DECEMBER 2017 VOLUME 27 ISSUE 12

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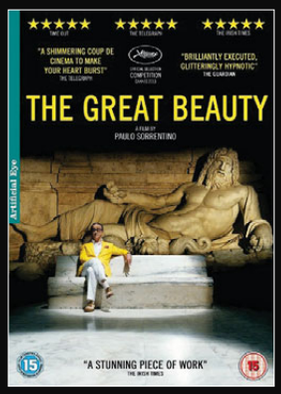
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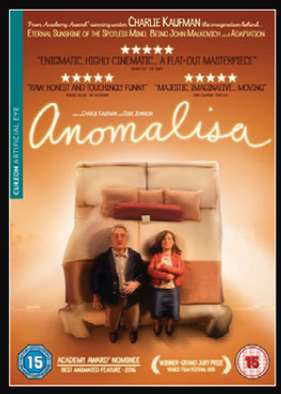

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Editorial enquiries
21 Stephen Street London W1T 1LN
t: 020 7255 1444
w: bfi.org.uk/sightandsound
e: S&S@bfi.org.uk

Social media
f: facebook.com/SightSoundmag
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Subscriptions
t: 020 8955 7070
e: sightandsound@abacusemedia.com
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CONTRIBUTORS

Erika Balsom is senior lecturer in film studies at King's College London

Serena Bramble is a film editor who writes on her blog 'Brief Encounters of the Cinematic Kind'

Geoff Brown writes on film and classical music for the *Times*

Dan Callahan has written biographies of Barbara Stanwyck and Vanessa Redgrave

Philip Concannon is a freelance writer and programmer who blogs at philonfilm.net

Pamela Hutchinson is the author of the BFI Film Classic on *Pandora's Box* and writes about film at silentlondon.co.uk

Philip Kemp is a freelance writer and film historian

Mark Kermode is a writer and broadcaster and the author of the BFI Modern Classic on *The Exorcist*

Will Lawrence is a freelance film writer and a contributing editor to *Empire*

Christina Newland is a New York-born, Nottingham-based freelance journalist

Kim Newman's novel *Anno Dracula: One Thousand Monsters* was published in October

Ben Nicholson is a freelance film critic and editor of *CineVue*

Nick Pinkerton is a New York-based film critic and programmer whose writing regularly appears in *Sight & Sound*, *Little White Lies* and *Frieze*

Virginie Sélavy is founder and editor-at-large of the online magazine *Electric Sheep*

Becca Voelcker is a PhD candidate writing about experimental film at Harvard University

Kelli Weston is studying for a PhD at Birkbeck, University of London

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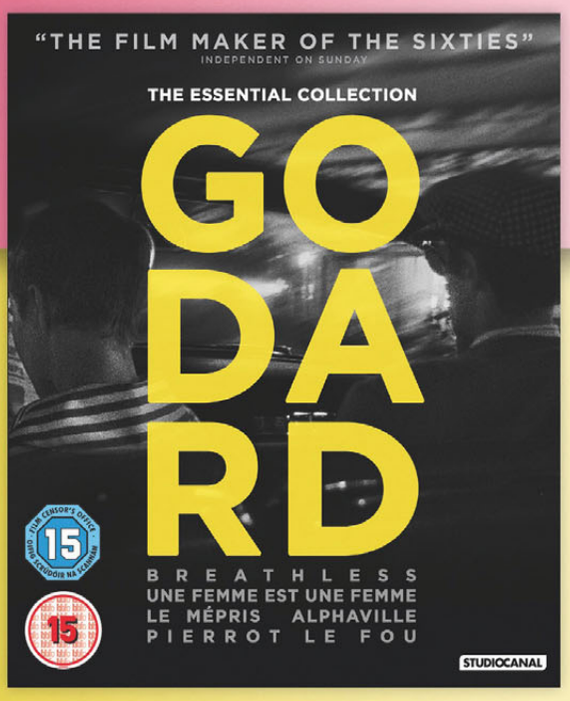

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Pieter Sonke
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chrisbrawndesign.com
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BUSINESS

Publisher
Rob Winter
Publishing coordinator
Natalie Griffith
Advertising consultant
Ronnie Hackston
T: 020 7957 8916
M: 07799 605 212
E: ronnie.hackston@bfi.org.uk

Newsstand distribution
Seymour
T: 020 7429 4000
E: info@seymour.co.uk

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Subscription Department
Sight & Sound
Abacus e-Media
3rd Floor Chancery Exchange
10 Furnival Street, London, EC4A 1AB
T: 020 8955 7070
F: 020 8421 8244
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Editorial Nick James

FESTIVAL OF RESISTANCE

Greetings from Mexico, where, as many before me have said, it's possible to experience a kind of time travel. Sometimes you feel like you're stepping back into a pre-industrial century; at others it's like you've arrived in a prediction of the future. There is, for instance, a burgeoning middle class here that, according to a 2013 report, grew in a decade from around 29 per cent of the population to 39 per cent, and which provides a restless urban energy. But it is less visible in rural areas, and Mexico continues to be a place where the gap between the super-wealthy and everyone else is stark. In that sense, Mexico may, sadly, be a jump ahead in the West's direction of travel.

Mexico is, of course, the nation most often deprecated by the president of the United States, with his rhetoric about building a wall and his characterisation of Latinos as thieves and rapists. The country has also just suffered a series of earthquakes, including the most deadly in a century. These are heavy burdens to contemplate from any film festival that wants to be celebratory, as the always welcoming Festival Internacional de Cine de Morelia does. To mix perceptions of political change in the world with urgent shifts in the moving-image industries can seem incongruous, but I want to cite here examples of the usefulness of film festivals in giving perspective on wider issues and as focal points for cultural and political resistance, however small.

A push in the opposite direction to Donald Trump's was backed here by the USA's Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, whose new president John Bailey was present to launch a series of screenings designed to show how often Mexican talent has been nominated for or won an Oscar (75 times). Legend even has it that the great actor-director Emilio 'El Indio' Fernández was the model for the statuette – Gregory Nava, the American director of *El Norte* (1983), says he can substantiate it – but the key example here has been set designer Emile Kuri, the first Mexican to win an Oscar, celebrated with a screening of William Wyler's flawless *The Heiress* (1949).

Kuri was also nominated for his work on *Mary Poppins* (1964), which means that, for British children who saw it on release like I did, he helped shape part of the pop-cinema mythology of our own city. You could call this a kind of cultural globalisation before globalisation became an accepted reality. Ideas about the meaning of a place or a nation are always subject to constant outside influence – something that was true long before Britain joined the EU. I mention the EU because so many of the people I have met in Mexico see Brexit and Trump as part of the same global phenomenon, regarding it as a xenophobic or racist reaction against globalisation.

If there is one film that brings that phenomenon into sharp focus it is Barbet Schroeder's powerful, sometimes gruelling documentary *The Venerable W.*, about the

Barbet Schroeder's documentary 'The Venerable W.', about the genocide of the Rohingya in Myanmar, offers a devastating portrait of Buddhism being used to promote ethnic cleansing

genocide of the Rohingya in Myanmar. I missed the film when it showed at Cannes and at the BFI London Film Festival but in a way I'm glad I did because, in the polyglot context of Morelia, where almost everyone has command of at least three languages, in the heart of a countryside inhabited by indigenous peoples and where the influence of religion is everywhere, its portrait of Buddhism being used to promote ethnic cleansing seems all the more devastating.

The film leaves us in no doubt that what's happening in Myanmar is indeed a genocide, promoted by the influential monk Ashin Wirathu, whose rhetoric towards the Muslim population is so chillingly like that of Nazi Germany. The film's horrific images of multiple murder remain indelible. That there are parallels between Wirathu's speeches and Trump's is also clear. Trump and Brexit are seen by many as the last gasps of ageing populations in the UK and the USA. Whether that proves to be true or not, the opposite is the case in Myanmar: Wirathu's legions of monks are young men obliged by their religion and society to become monks for a period of time – so that in a sense Myanmar has two armies, one of which is saffron-robed and made up of zealous conscripts. If that isn't a warning for the future, I don't know what is.

Born out of revolution and compromised by the drug traffickers, Mexico itself is no stranger to violence. But the fact that it can host a festival like the one in Morelia gives me hope for the positive effect of film festivals in general. This kind of positivity is obviously sorely needed in an industry still reeling from the Weinstein scandal, which all of us at *Sight & Sound* have been appalled by and which offers an overdue opportunity to push for change – a critical issue addressed by a series of high-profile British industry figures on page 10.

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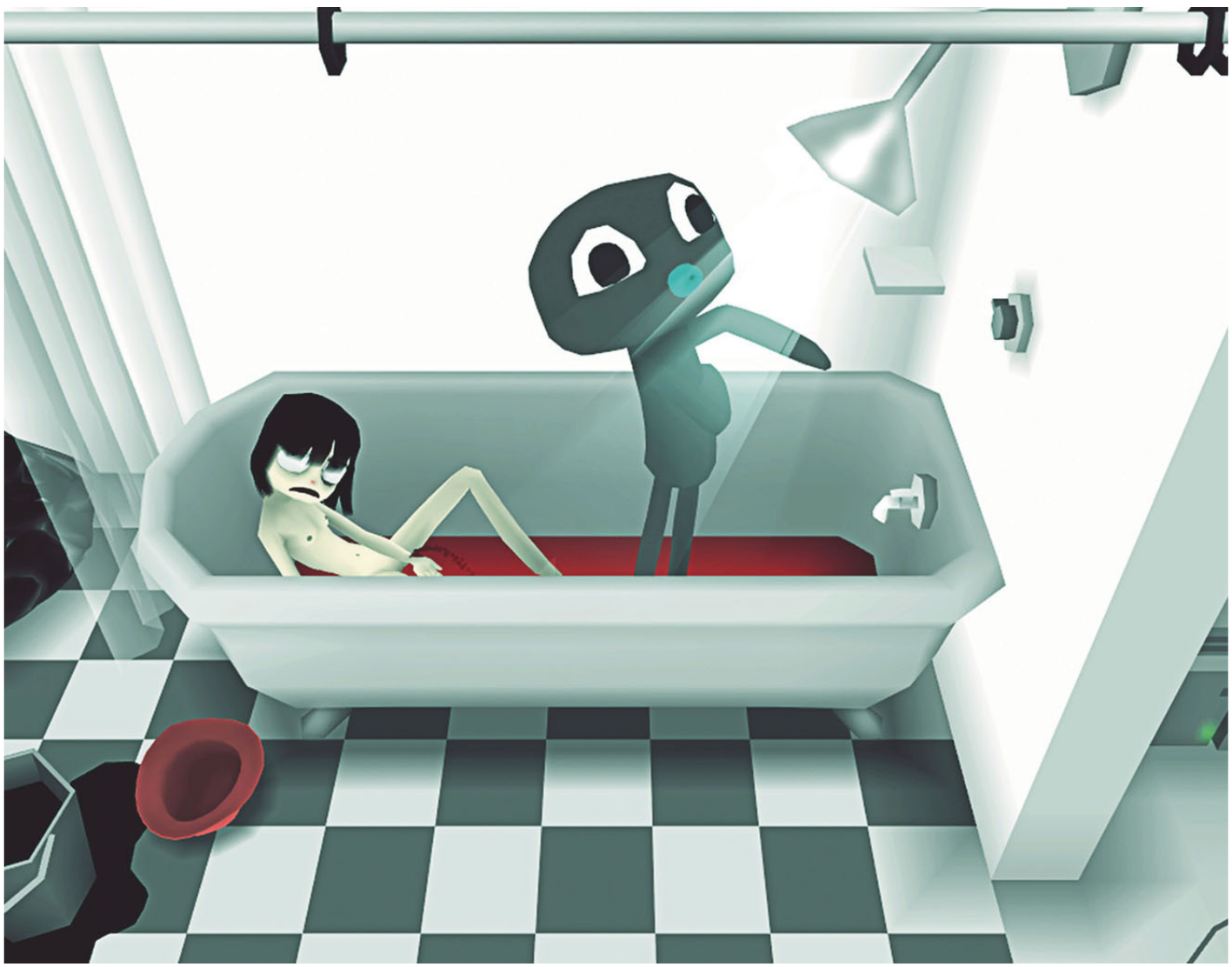


▲ Animation festivals

Over the next two months, two vital showcases for independent animation are the stand-outs of the UK festival calendar: Manchester Animation Festival (14-16 November at HOME) and London International Animation Festival (1-10 December, at the Barbican, Horse Hospital and Close-Up Film Centre). Alongside masterclasses and a bursting programme of new shorts, Manchester's event highlights 100 years of Argentinian animation and hosts the European premiere of Don Hertzfeldt's *World of Tomorrow: Episode Two* (it also screens at LIAF), which, like the first part, draws on the candid audio recordings of his five-year-old niece. Meanwhile, LIAF opens with a celebration of David OReilly – including a screening of *The External World* (2010, above) – whose absurdist animation can be found in features, music videos, interactive projects and video games. The London event also offers highlights of Barcelona's abstract animation festival Punto Y Raya and promises a programme of female-led animation.

◀ Modigliani and early cinema

23 November – 2 April

An Amedeo Clemente Modigliani exhibition at Tate Modern in London uncovers the influence of early cinema on the work of the French painter, who died at the age of just 35 in 1920. The show explores his time in the heady cultural world of Paris in the early 1900s, a time when cinema was expanding rapidly. Also highlighted are Modigliani's links to avant-garde filmmakers, such as the poet and filmmaker Jean Cocteau (seen in a portrait by the artist, left), and the influence of cinematic language as well as individual films on his paintings. An insightful essay in the accompanying catalogue posits that Modigliani was an extra in Abel Gance's epic anti-war film *J'Accuse* (1919).

▲ Into Film Festival

8-24 November

The perennial moan is that young people don't go to the cinema these days, if they even choose to watch films at all. But cinema-going in the UK has become increasingly expensive, often prohibitively so for younger audiences. Enter this vital UK-wide event (see intofilm.org) for five- to 19-year-olds. The Into Film Festival (above) boasts 3,000 free cinema screenings, showcasing more than 140 films (grouped into timely programmes dedicated to activism and immigration) at more than 600 venues.

▲ Cinecity

10-26 November

This year Brighton's annual film festival expands beyond venues in the city to include the new Depot cinema in nearby Lewes and the Towner Art Gallery in Eastbourne. Alongside previews of some of the most lauded new films – among them *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (above) and *The Square* – highlights include a focus on music, with an exhibition of Christian '*The Clock*' Marclay's new film *Looking for Love*, a celebration of analogue sound, and a screening of *The Ballad of Shirley Collins*, about one of Britain's great folk singers.

▼ Underwire Film Festival

22-26 November

The UK's largest festival dedicated to female filmmakers returns in style this November. As ever, its selection of shorts – grouped thematically into idiosyncratic programmes, such as 'Don't let the bastards grind you down' and 'Mommie Dearest' – is a great place to search out new voices. It offers a celebration of up-and-coming British filmmaker Kate Herron's shorts – including her episode of *five by five*, starring Idris Elba (below) – as well as three feature debuts, a 20th anniversary screening of Sally Potter's *The Tango Lesson* and a weekend-long series of industry events.

◀ Save the Cinema Museum

Worrying news has reached the *Sight & Sound* office: one of London's film wonders, the Cinema Museum (left), is under threat from developers. Housed in the old Lambeth Workhouse where Charlie Chaplin spent some of his childhood, the Cinema Museum is a cabinet of cinematic curiosities, hosting a vast collection of memorabilia and artefacts, from lobby cards and cinema uniforms to projectors and posters, not to mention 17 million feet of film. The museum, which is staffed entirely by volunteers, has been in its present home for 19 years but its lease expires in March 2018. Despite efforts to purchase the property at a reasonable price, the museum has stated that its landlord, South London and Maudsley NHS Trust, will be selling it to the highest bidder. See www.cinemamuseum.org.uk for details of an online petition and further news updates.

IN THE COMPANY OF MEN

Eliza Hittman's *Beach Rats* follows the growing pains of a gay teenager in a macho blue-collar world of sun, sea, sand and sex

By Christina Newland

In Eliza Hittman's second feature *Beach Rats*, a teenage street tough named Frankie (Harris Dickinson) lives a fraught double life. By day, he drifts through the sweltering Coney Island summer with a flock of stoned macho pals. By night, he cruises for older gay lovers. Filmed on 16mm, the night-time neons of the boardwalk gorgeously refracted, the locations are captured with a lyrical intensity by cinematographer Hélène Louvart, who also shot Wim Wenders's *Pina* (2012) and Agnès Varda's *The Beaches of Agnes* (2008).

Hittman's film is fascinated by the physicality of its subjects, relishing the details of belly rings and rippling male torsos. With a jarring, sexy style, *Beach Rats* manages to be both a deeply felt examination of a gay man coming to terms with his sexuality and a sympathetic portrait of blue-collar masculinity.

Christina Newland: I think of New York as one of the most LGBT-friendly places on earth. But you zero in on a very blue-collar pocket of Brooklyn, which is more traditional. What made you choose that setting?

Eliza Hittman: For me, as somebody who's grown up in NYC, I watch it change radically every ten years. There are so many filmmakers who move to New York and make films about it. And it's always from a certain perspective – people trying to carve out their identity in the city. But then there's this other side of it where people are kind of just trying to get out. You have these films from the 70s like *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) – all these kinds of movies about people who are trapped in the city.

CN: *Beach Rats* uses lots of tight close-ups and has a real visual flair. Did you preconceive the style of the shoot, and can you tell me a little about using 16mm?

EH: Part of my interest in the characters is that they feel out of time. They have haircuts that feel like the early 60s or late 50s. So the decision to shoot on 16mm came from wanting to give the entire look of the film an 'out of time' quality – because the areas are so isolated.

Part of the creative dialogue that happened with my DP Hélène Louvart early on was talking about how we would shoot the beach scenes at night. And we sat in several cruising locations and watched these transactional encounters disappearing into darkness. We were thinking about how we were going to shoot these things that took place in total darkness.

So we developed a strategy where we used a frontal lighting scheme, and never did a traditional lighting set-up in the whole movie. It was all LED on a pole that the gaffer held. And that strategy came out of the desire to make the audience feel like they were witnessing something that they shouldn't be seeing – almost as if you were turning a flashlight on in the darkness and catching a moment between two people.

Summer lovin': Eliza Hittman's *Beach Rats*

When you have a group of people who are isolated from opportunity, it's important you show this boredom that's brewing

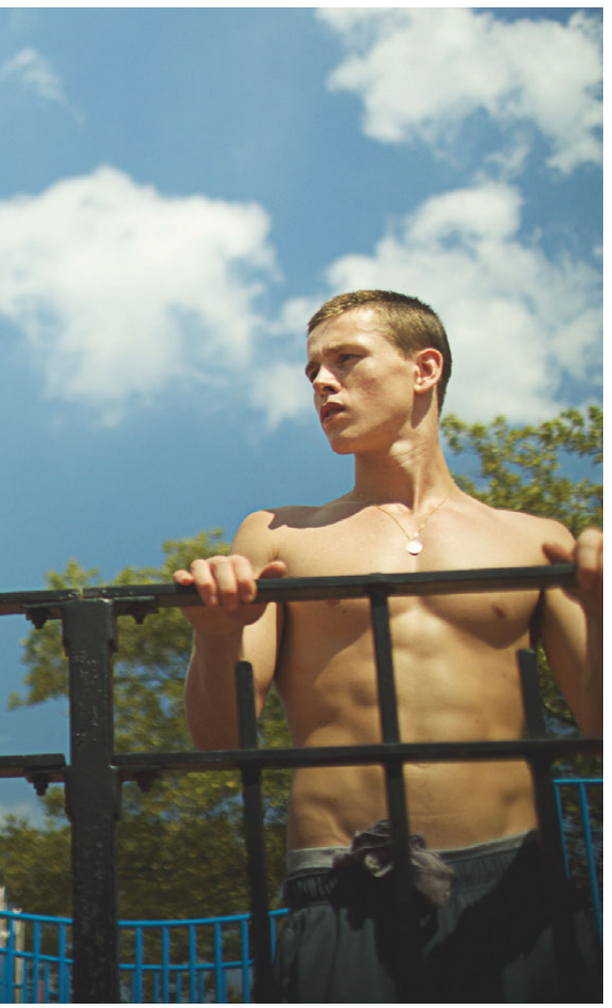
Eliza Hittman

CN: Was that anxiety-inducing, using a non-traditional lighting set-up and filming on 16mm?

EH: It was anxiety-inducing for our financiers! But we did several camera tests. And everyone was like, "What if you just filmed digital at night?" But no, the whole point was that we wanted to be able to shape the light on the bodies and if everything is overly light-sensitive, then we wouldn't have the same level of control. Another motivation to shoot 16mm was that a lot of my male peers in New York film on 16mm and it started to feel really gendered. It's something that men fetishise and ask for. I think women often don't fight for things in the same way and are willing to compromise just to get the movie made.

CN: Harris Dickinson's physicality is so perfect for the role – he has a kind of otherworldly beauty at some angles, and at others he looks like a regular guy on the street. Can you tell me about casting him?

EH: When we opened up the casting call to LA, this tape came in from this young actor named Harris Dickinson. And then we found out he was British! It's interesting, he self-taped his audition. And he framed the camera very close to him and his eyes. He didn't try to amplify any kind of macho behaviour or force a performance – and it was very internal, minimal and striking. He spent a lot of time hanging out with the non-actors that were street-cast in the film, and



playing ball with them, and understanding the limitations of their surroundings.

CN: The characterisation of Frankie's friends is never one-dimensional. They steal stuff, do drugs, but they're not hateful, just kind of bored. How important was it to you to treat the supporting characters in a non-judgemental way?

EH: It was important to me that when you have a group of people who are isolated from opportunity, and there's a stagnancy in that world, that you show this boredom that's brewing – this pent-up aggression. That was an important feeling to create in the film – the homophobia in essence is internal, but is then externalised. And all of those supporting actors were street-cast.

CN: There are so many sensual shots of male torsos in the film, and you seem to really refocus the camera's gaze to that of a gay man's here. Was that something you were conscious of while making *Beach Rats*?

EH: A lot of the references in the film come from photography. One photographer I found was somebody from Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn, named Danny Fitzgerald, in the late 50s and early 60s. He took a lot of physique photography of Brooklyn thugs and there's this interesting tension between the macho and the erotic. So that was something I was trying to echo.

***Beach Rats* is released in UK cinemas on 24 November and is reviewed on page 57**

THE NUMBERS
IN BETWEEN

By Charles Gant

Sometimes, in the world of arthouse film distribution, luck is on your side. When Peccadillo Pictures chose 22 September as the release date for Maysaloun Hamoud's *In Between* – a drama about three disparate Palestinian women sharing an apartment in Tel Aviv – its chief competition among fellow new releases was Curzon's *Borg vs McEnroe*. Peccadillo could hardly have anticipated that this slice of tennis history would prove such a wipeout with audiences, achieving a weak site average of £703.

In Between, meanwhile, opened with a solid £17,300 from just seven cinemas, including previews of £2,800. As Peccadillo boss Tom Abell explains, "Exhibitors could see that we had achieved this result despite mostly playing just one show per day, and often at not great times."

The result was that *In Between* expanded a week later to 28 cinemas – including the widest penetration of the Everyman chain ever achieved by a Peccadillo title. Abell says, "It helped that a lot of the exhibitors weren't that impressed with what came out on 29 September. I think the studios were just throwing things away that day. When *In Between* was clearly working, a lot of them were quite keen to play something that seemed to be catching the imagination."

Luck was also on Peccadillo's side when the *Guardian* ran its interview with Hamoud a week after release. "It was supposed to run the Friday of release," says Abell, "but for some reason it wasn't able to, so they ran it the next week, which worked perfectly for the film expanding on to lots more screens. That was just a very fortunate error."

When Peccadillo bought *In Between*, it had anticipated a Jewish audience and also a traditional arthouse audience – which in the UK tends to skew middle-aged and older. The fact that one of the three women is a lesbian potentially offered another audience segment but, Abell explains,

Circle of friends: *In Between*

"In our experience, that's more of a home-entertainment audience." There's also a large, cinema-going UK Muslim population, but Peccadillo was cautious: "Usually, that's an audience that doesn't go to arthouse screens."

The distributor would end up being pleasantly surprised on all fronts, and most of all by the age demographic. "We didn't realise it would have such a huge appeal to younger people," Abell says. "The thing that really stood out in the Q&A screenings we attended: there were a lot of 25- to 35-year-olds, and with a notable female skew." After 31 days on release, *In Between* had sailed past Peccadillo's target of £70,000 at the UK box office, and had reached £137,000 at press time.

When a film succeeds seemingly from nowhere, it's often the case that the aspects that render it a distribution challenge – the lack of any proven hits in a similar vein – are also the opportunity for audiences: the film is offering something fresh, different, original.

"It's always our challenge, with most of the films we release," says Abell, whose biggest hit as distributor remains black-and-white Amazon adventure *Embrace of the Serpent* (2015). "Bringing relative unknowns, that's always a challenge. We have to do it every time, persuading the cinemas that we can bring an audience into the films. Thanks to fantastic word-of-mouth from audiences, we achieved it."

ISRAELI/PALESTINIAN FILMS AT THE UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
Waltz with Bashir	2008	£704,249
Paradise Now	2006	£163,060
In Between	2017	£136,638*
Divine Intervention	2003	£106,702
Lebanon	2010	£77,295
Lemon Tree	2008	£76,555
Broken Wings	2003	£55,323
The Time That Remains	2010	£53,875
Five Broken Cameras	2012	£46,692
Omar	2014	£44,769

*gross at press time

WHAT NEXT AFTER WEINSTEIN?

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHELLE THOMPSON

Key figures from the UK film industry on what steps need to be taken in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein scandal

The widespread allegations of Harvey Weinstein's history of sexual harassment, bullying and abusive behaviour have rightly been met with condemnation. But deplorable as Weinstein's actions have been, few doubt that they are only an egregious example of a type of behaviour that infects the film business at all levels. In their wake there is an opportunity for the industry to confront systemic issues that have been left unaddressed for too long, so *Sight & Sound* has asked a range of key figures from UK film and television for their thoughts on what needs to happen now to ensure real change.

Heather Stewart
Creative director, BFI

There has now been a deluge of words on the exertion of power in male-dominated industries – whether it's Hollywood, music, financial services, whatever – where there is lots of money at stake and where, anecdotally, predatory and bullying behaviours are fuelled by drink and drugs.

In a myriad of tiny ways these behaviours can happen in the independent and public sectors, not just the glamorous high-stakes world of women trying to make it in a competitive industry where what you look like and which men you please really counts – we keep reading how Harvey Weinstein kept telling young women to lose weight! – and unchaperoned 'interviews' can take place in hotel bedrooms.

When I started working in film in the 1980s it was routine to have a 'business' lunch and be invited upstairs afterwards. One distributor whom I had never met, sitting beside me on a plane to Cannes (and I was seven months pregnant at the time) told me we could have 'fun' together on his boat that night, and advised me to fill my villa with girls if I wanted to do business. I advised him that I was staying in an £8-a-night room at The Star Hotel and that BFI budgets did not stretch to hiring prostitutes. It was of course routine to have men make idiotically sexist remarks, and to demean your professional contribution by not listening, or the usual, by repeating what you have just said and it then being praised as a great idea. I have had cause to make a formal complaint about sexual harassment once in my working life (before I worked at the BFI); the other stuff was not worth the effort because of repercussions, and there was nothing that was a crime or I would have called the police. The one I did report was unresolved as it was not taken seriously.

Today I am in my 60s and in a senior position in my organisation (where the CEO and 50 per cent of the executive team are women), so no more invites for fun on boats, but from what we read about, it still goes on. Casual sexism and trivial but inappropriate behaviours are a backdrop to this, which I will always call out, but the bigger picture is that the asymmetry of power, the lack of women in lead roles in the industry, and the roles we see women play on the big screen, continue to prop up a status quo that I am fed up with. The 'see it to be it' mantra is true. How can my daughter imagine her life when what is so often imagined for her on the big screen is a one-dimensional, skinny, half-dressed sidekick to a male protagonist?

Let's focus on some simple, immediate things we are doing where I work.

The BFI's Lottery funding requires people to think about diversity if they want to use public money, on screen and behind the camera. And we believe that ultimately the commercial marketplace will wake up to the economic value of offering choice.

Change is happening, but very slowly. We have recently made available a Filmography of all 10,000 UK feature films released in the nation's cinemas since 1911. We have an evidence base to understand what roles have been available to women across the 250,000 listed cast and crew who made these films, and from which we can actually measure change. The most depressing bit of data is that 100 years on, gender stereotyping is still the norm in the casting of unnamed roles. Men are still doctors, women are prostitutes. The percentage of female directors is small; of women working in cinematography and sound, tiny. In the 'see it to be it' stakes,

what does my daughter imagine she can be when the number of onscreen roles for women is still 31 per cent – the same as it was in 1913.

We believe it is essential to champion women's creative contribution, women's stories and potential. What men want to see dominates what gets made. Our audiences want choice. The 'dead white men' domination of programming only serves to reinforce values that we want to change, a world which accepts routine bullying and ridicule of women. With the BFI's public programme we set ourselves goals to ensure we have a high percentage of films written or directed by, or featuring, women; an equal mix of men and women on stage for events; and women's voices in *Sight & Sound*. We've just finished the London Film Festival, which is run by a woman, with 25 per cent of films directed by women – not perfect but definitely way above the international film festival average. Next summer, for example, we will only be programming work either made by women or centred on women, and our major Comedy blockbuster season next autumn has women writers and great female comic performances at the core of its programme.

Adopting basic codes of behaviour, making it clear how to report an issue and that it will be taken seriously and dealt with quickly, can help make it simple and safe to raise concerns without fear of repercussion. Awareness training for all of us should mean that we have the same understanding of what bullying and harassment look like, and what is appropriate behaviour in the workplace, and to this end we are updating our staff training programmes.

Jennifer Smith
Head of inclusion, BFI

As the world continues to reel from the shock of the past few weeks and faces the endless avalanche of new allegations, our industry is forced to actually confront what has been bubbling underneath the surface for decades. Widespread condemnation of one person's actions must surely be followed by change. There will always be bullies in this world, but surely the moment has come where they're just not tolerated any more. Where we all feel we can call out inappropriate behaviour the moment it surfaces. Where abuses of power are not met with silence, unchallenged. And where women's voices are both heard and listened to.

The film industry urgently needs more women represented on every level both on and off screen. Would recently reported events have taken so long to surface if there were more women in senior roles in this industry?

It feels like we've all been talking about diversity and inclusion for ages. Now we need to see real change. The BFI Diversity Standards are embedded in everything we do and have to be met by every project we support with National Lottery funds. We have a clear target of 50/50 gender representation. We're now gathering together a wide range of industry partners, with advice from Acas, to jointly develop a new set of principles that will address bullying, harassment and abuse at work. They should also help people in the industry to be better supported. These new principles will be incorporated in the Diversity Standards.

These standards aren't in themselves going to change the world overnight. But they are an important step in helping to redress the balance. And they're starting to be adopted across the industry. Bafta and Film4 have shown courageous leadership by adopting them and we hope other broadcasters, studios and production companies will join them.

Raising Films

Raising Films is a community and campaign by and for parents and carers in the UK film and TV industry. In July 2017 we published 'Raising Our Game', a landmark research report exposing the failure of the industry to offer its workforce fair employment rights, in recognition that the power structures working against parents and carers relate to wider exclusionary and unlawful practices.

The recent stories concerning abusive behaviour by Harvey Weinstein have publicly exposed these working conditions in the film industry. Inequalities in the sector are endemic and well documented, going back at least to Reena Bhavnani's 2007 report for the UK Film Council, which concludes with detailed and practical solutions that inspired our 'Raising Our Game' checklists and recommendations.

Yet abuses of power persist within the industry; so too does the inability to take action to prevent this. We do not have adequate systems or structures in place for workers to challenge unfair and unlawful behaviour. We call for:

a sector-wide independent investigation into the extent of unlawful/unfair employment practices, led by a national industry body;

an industry-specific independent body, headed by a legal expert, funded by the Skills Levy, with the power to arbitrate and to order compensation;

support for individuals going to court or tribunal, and provision of guidance for employees, collaborated between unions and guilds;

and scalable HR training, an enforceable equality duty, and a visible move toward diverse boards and leadership, for all companies with public funding, including tax credits.

For the full open letter with 400-plus industry signatories, see www.raisingfilms.com/action-open-letter.

Ramy El-Bergamy
Onscreen diversity executive, Channel 4

As shocking as the Weinstein allegations are, they're not wholly surprising. People have been abusing their positions of power since time immemorial. This isn't a film problem. Or a TV problem. Or even a workplace problem. It's a societal problem. It's a problem that stems from a society that makes it acceptable to joke about rape. A society that allows women to feel uncomfortable when travelling on public transport and just accept that getting groped is par for the course. A society that enables the patriarchy to remind women of their place. A society that blames victims of abuse and harassment on what they wear. How can we help? At Channel 4, our commitment to diversity is entrenched in everything we do. Our 360-degree charter champions inclusivity

It is essential to champion women's creative contribution, women's stories and potential. The 'dead white men' domination of programming only serves to reinforce values that we want to change, a world which accepts routine bullying and ridicule of women.
Heather Stewart

There has to be an industry-wide response, and an industry-wide mechanism put in place so that people can, with a certain amount of discretion, go somewhere with their complaints. The unions should take more responsibility too and more people should join them, in particular the media and entertainment union Bectu
Rebecca O'Brien

and helps create an environment where everyone can prosper and thrive and enables us all to be our authentic self without fear of shame. Bullying and sexual abuse and harassment should never be tolerated or allowed to infiltrate the workplace like a cancer. Now, more than ever, we all have a chance to ensure it does not happen again.

Daniel Battsek
Director of Film4
It is important to recognise that the Harvey Weinstein scandal only scratches at the surface of what is being exposed as a much more widespread problem within the workplace and society at large. The predatory attitude that many men appear to demonstrate in their treatment of women needs to be called out for what it is, and not explained away as an 'affliction' except in those circumstances where it is medically diagnosed as an illness requiring 'therapy'.

It is my hope that if any good is to come out of the exposure of this substantial problem, then let it be a consistent effort to tackle these issues rather than a bright flare that shines for a brief moment, before it disappears and the status quo returns. It is our responsibility to make the film industry a safe environment for those who work in it, and to make sure that the voices of these courageous women, from all walks of life, who have spoken out about their dealings with blatant misogyny and abuse of power are a catalyst for change.

People in positions of responsibility need to create a safe environment where speaking up confidentially, either to a line manager or an HR representative, about any incidence of harassment feels not only possible but mandatory, so that we can stamp the abuse out before it has a chance to take hold. As part of this we need to encourage a more inclusive and gender-balanced environment throughout the industry, at all levels. More companies adhering to the BFI's Diversity Standards would help with this in the UK.

In practical terms, perhaps the BFI could look at creating a confidential whistleblowing facility, in case people don't feel able to speak out within their own organisations.

Rebecca O'Brien
Producer, Sixteen Films *I, Daniel Blake* (2016), *The Spirit of '45* (2013), *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (2006), et al
One of the problems of the film world is that it's a freelance industry, so in general you don't have the safety-valve mechanisms that organisations have – like HR departments. It's appalling that people did try to call out Harvey Weinstein along the way and were told, "That's just Harvey, that's just the way it is." We need a system in place where people are taken seriously and believed.

There has to be an industry-wide response, and an industry-wide mechanism put in place so that people can, with a certain amount of discretion, go somewhere with their complaints. One idea is to set up some sort of helpline. The unions should take more responsibility too and more people should join them, in particular the media and entertainment union Bectu – it is in a position to fight on behalf of freelancers.

If everyone did a course on bullying and harassment, like they would a health and safety course, then there would be no excuse. We need to get together in the industry and make that sort of thing a priority
Kate Kinninmont

Quite a lot of abuse has taken place in the financing area. I've heard stories of abuse by financiers and producers – bullying mainly – in the funding sector. That's the area that Harvey was part of. This isn't policed by a union. So I think some sort of network of female producers – senior women working in the industry – need to be reachable. We need to create our own HR department. That's not to say that abusive behaviour doesn't happen to men, too, of course.

The Weinstein stories are especially shocking, but are just the most egregious examples. I have witnessed bullying happening, and not just to younger people – I've seen quite senior people being bullied in this industry. It's usually about people finding ways to display their ego. It's a misconception and a cliché that a producer needs to be aggressive. There's a big difference between bullying behaviour and flexing your muscles. There are people who misinterpret how they are supposed to behave and haven't seen good practice. Some people come into the industry and only see people getting their way through bullying.

The groups I'm part of have got plans to meet and come up with concrete ideas. Our film policy group at Pact (Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television) are meeting to discuss the way forward. I'm sure other organisations are doing this too. The BFI, BSAC (British Screen Advisory Council), Bafta, Women in Film & Television UK, the Production Guild, the unions – they all need to get together and discuss what to do about it. You don't want to lose this opportunity to change things.

Kate Muir
Screenwriter and critic
The Weinstein allegations shone a klieg light into the film industry, revealing an atmosphere of toxic masculinity in Hollywood where women struggle to survive, let alone thrive. Now the debate has started, it needs to continue at every level, not merely about workplace practices, but across the industry. As a critic until recently for the *Times*, I sat in screening rooms with mostly male colleagues, watching top box-office films, 96 per cent of which were directed by men last year. Those films starred actresses paid, on average, one-third of their male equivalents. In any other industry, this would be cause for rioting. In Hollywood, it is cause for Oscars.

For writers, concrete steps must include calling out inequalities and lack of diversity. A few years ago, I joined Women and Hollywood, which campaigns for gender diversity in film. When Cannes fails to have any female directors in competition in 2010 and 2012, we must ask why, loudly. When Roman Polanski gets a free pass from critics we must ask, how would that play if he worked in a school? When Woody Allen writes another film with an adult/teen affair, we must do more than sigh. And here's a final thought for *Sight & Sound* readers who love auteurs, but rarely hear of the feminine *auteure*. That must change too. As Wicktionary notes: "While some European dictionaries and the Académie française do not list a feminine equivalent of *auteur*, *auteure* (or *autrice*) are occasionally used in European French. *Auteure* is now common in Canadian French."

www.womenandhollywood.com
@womenahollywood

Amanda Berry OBE
Chief executive, Bafta
Bafta believes everyone working in the film, games and television industries has the right to work in a safe, professional working environment. We are working actively with the BFI and other industry bodies on a set of measures to help ensure abusive behaviour isn't tolerated, guidelines are robust and appropriate support is available for both those affected by harassment and employers.

Alison Owen
Producer *Elizabeth* (1998), *Jane Eyre* (2011), *Saving Mr. Banks* (2013), *Suffragette* (2015), *Tulip Fever* (2017), et al
The past few weeks have been both depressing and exhilarating as we have absorbed the extent of the abuse that has taken place and started to process how we can react and change things in our industry. The particular nature of our industry means that we have to be extra vigilant to protect all women (and men) against any kind of harassment or inappropriate conduct, and create a structure where individuals feel safe to complain if they are unhappy or concerned about any behaviour.

We have to break the culture of it being the Unspoken Subject, the one where the harassed person is made to feel like the 'difficult' one. We must implement written codes of conduct that are real, fair and enforceable, and not just there to protect the company from potential litigation.

We should have a universal 'code of conduct' that all agencies and industry bodies – Pact, BBC, Channel 4, etc – sign, that says specifically what behaviours are not OK. If this is stated in black and white it will reassure women that they are not going to get fobbed off with the usual 'can't you take a joke', 'it was meant as a compliment' kind of stuff. Individual productions can use this as a basis too, for crew

and cast and staff to sign as a matter of course.

Everyone should feel more comfortable if they know precisely what is acceptable and what oversteps the mark, and the procedures that will result if they overstep it.

We want our industry to be fun – no one is saying that a wink or an inoffensive joke is a problem. But clearly the parameters need to be drawn more clearly, so that we can initiate open conversation and break the taboo.

Kate Kinninmont MBE
Chief executive, Women in Film & Television UK

The present furore reminds me of the scene in *Casablanca* where the chief of police announces his horror that gambling is going on in Rick's nightclub: "I'm shocked! Shocked!" And then he pockets his winnings. There's scarcely a woman on the planet who has not had to cope with 'inappropriate behaviour'. Women, wearily, learn to deal with it. We get lots of practice. I've worked in TV since the 80s and I've seen my share of bullying and harassment. Five years ago as result of the Jimmy Savile revelations, Bafta got in touch and asked if this sort of sexual predatory behaviour is still prevalent. I did a survey of WFTV members as part of my research for a Bafta debate. More than half the people who responded had experienced something but didn't know who they could report it to. We're not talking about rape or criminal charges here but bullying and the kind of behaviours that denigrate people in the workplace.

At that Bafta debate, Dorothy Byrne, head of news and current affairs at Channel 4, spoke of starting out in the industry and being told: "You're going out with so and so today, he'll put his hand up your skirt. He does it with everyone." She was asked at the event what she had done to change this. Her reply: "I became head of news."

Women are still in the minority in the industry. For too long women have been restricted to roles where they look after people and serve. Nothing will really change until we have many more women on film sets and in positions of power – calling the shots, firing abusers.

Film facilitates particularly shameful behaviour. The illusion of glamour gives dominant, insecure men power over inexperienced young women, often broke and desperate to please. Film and television crews are still laddish; almost all directors are men and Hollywood studios remain overwhelmingly male. Most young workers are freelance; victims are isolated.

What has been normalised is a level of harassment, bullying and banter – it's so much part of the culture in some areas in film and television. On set, you'll often get what's described as banter: "Is it your time of the month?" "Have you lost your sense of humour, love?" Too often you have to find a way of dealing with that on your own.

The #MeToo online protests are important, but we can't just leave their revelations in people's timelines. WFTV is inviting women to email metoo@wftv.org.uk to share their testimonies and to say what would have helped them at the time and suggest what safeguards or help mechanisms we might create. See www.wftv.org.uk for more details. On our website we also have details of the Acas helpline – a workplace Samaritans, if you like.

I'm now looking at what people are sending in to us. The fascinating and worrying thing is that a lot of people did tell someone. But they just got told, "Oh, everyone knows about that person." Or they got told that they should just get over it.

Jennifer Smith, Head of inclusion at the BFI, is calling for representatives from each of the industry bodies to meet to agree on guidelines that are common to everyone. That's a great start. However, we've got legislation about equal pay but we've still got a gender pay gap. It's not about adding legislation. It's about changing the culture. We can't reform the bullies, and shouldn't demand that victims 'toughen up'. But we can change the bystanders. Everyone in the industry has to call out this kind of behaviour.

We need an impartial group or organisation that people can turn to. Even when companies have an HR department, they are often seen as management. What we need to establish is somewhere an individual can take a complaint but not make them a whistleblower.

We need to professionalise the film and TV industries. Interviews should not be a one-on-one in a bar or restaurant. At least two people should interview someone in a professional setting. If someone persists in bullying or sexually inappropriate behaviour, action needs to be taken.

If everyone did a course on bullying and harassment, like they would a health and safety course, then there would be no excuse. We need to get together in the industry and make that sort of thing a priority. It needs to be more sweeping than simply having one person on set who is responsible for behaviour, because would they have the power? It was only when Weinstein was losing his power that people spoke out. It's not just about one bad apple, it's a culture.

Elizabeth Karlsen
Producer, Number 9 Films *On Chesil Beach* (2017) *Their Finest* (2016), *Carol* (2015), *Made in Dagenham* (2010), et al

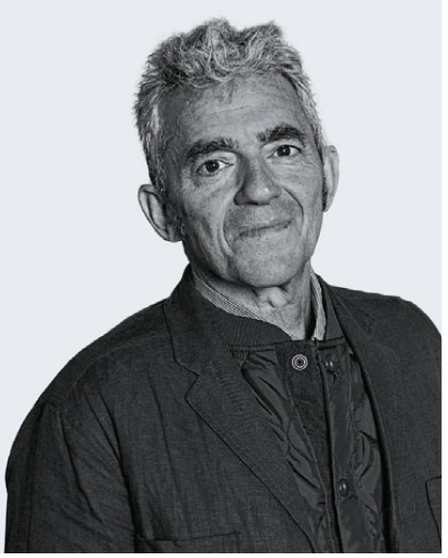
The changes needed are about empowerment and representation: more women writing stories, directing stories and producing stories; more women in meaningful roles in those stories; more women in executive positions of power in studios and independent financing, production and distribution outfits; more women journalists reviewing films and writing about the industry – an industry which does not allow legal documents purporting to be in the interests of a business actually being used to protect the illegal activities of a sexual predator (non-disclosure agreements). In a very practical way, a code of conduct within companies and on sets, which offers protection to those at risk of exploitation and a phone line that operates like Childline set up by the industry or government. Finally, I am stunned by the number of high-profile individuals who have worked in the industry for decades and said words like, "I am saddened and shocked and knew nothing about these allegations." That is simply not true. Be brave, tell the truth even if it is shaming and difficult. Put the possibility of change before self interest.

The changes needed are about empowerment and representation: more women writing, directing and producing; more women in meaningful roles in those stories; more women in executive positions of power in studios and independent financing, production and distribution outfits; more women journalists reviewing films and writing about the industry

Elizabeth Karlsen

We need to encourage a more inclusive and gender-balanced environment throughout the industry, at all levels. More companies adhering to the BFI's Diversity Standards would help with this in the UK.

Daniel Battsek



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BODY AND SOUL

Music has often explored the amorphous boundary between the sacred and the sexual – but which films probe similar terrain?

By Mark Cousins

I've been filming in Morocco. During the long drives between cities, we listened to music, especially the great Egyptian singer-arranger Oum Kalthoum. In the Middle East, Kalthoum was something like Elvis meets Aretha meets Eleanor Roosevelt meets Madonna: an icon in dark glasses and a chronicler of personal and national wounds, her songs deal in archetypes, the Arabic paradise lost, and an almost mystical longing. The great Iranian artist Shirin Neshat has just made a film about her.

Middle Eastern friends have talked of an almost sexual aspect to the Kalthoum myth. Her long – 40 minutes or more – hypnotic and trancey songs induced excitement and arousal, and I've heard of men masturbating in public to them. Many of her fans would be horrified at this, but it is true.

We think of the sacred and sexual as poles apart, but of course they often aren't. Recall Bernini's sculpture *The Ecstasy of St Teresa* in Rome – she is orgasmic – or all those Saint Sebastian paintings in which his near-naked martyrdom seems the product of the erotic imagination.

Driving along, Kalthoum's haunting, soaring, yearning music made me think of movies, of course. Are there films with a similar masala? And if we had to programme a season of, say, a dozen of them, what would we show?

Not Carl Theodor Dreyer or Robert Bresson, for sure. They are among the most religious of European filmmakers, but are almost frenzyless. A better first contender might be Ahmed El Maanouni's Moroccan musical film *Trances* (1981) – restored by the World Cinema Foundation – whose title alone indicates its feel. Like Kalthoum's music, El Maanouni's film seems to spiral, to lose itself and inhibition. Also in North Africa, the Egyptian films of Youssef Chahine sometimes have a similar progression. The ending of his movie *The Sparrow* (1972), for example, is a scream for Arab socialism, a melodramatic crescendo to a film that has often been interested in the physical beauty of its actors (Chahine discovered Omar Sharif).

What about Europe? Luis Buñuel might well be included in our season, but which of his films? *Viridiana* (1961), maybe, or is it too anti-religious? Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Theorem* (1968) is most definitely about sex and god – we see a woman levitating and a close-up of Terence Stamp's crotch. But Pasolini films aren't really cut fast enough to create frenzy. We're closer to the tone we're looking for in the work of Vera Chytilová, such as *Fruit of Paradise* (1970). She is very interested in bodies, the sublime, rapid editing and swirling camera moves, but is there enough of the sacred in her films? And what about Lucile Hadzihalilovic, who worked with sex-meister Gaspar Noé and then went on to make trance-like dreamscapes such as *Evolution* (2015)? The main characters are boys in this film, so it isn't really sexual, but it has the woozy, cyclical intensity of Kalthoum's music, and has the colour-controlled sensuality of Pina Bausch's dance choreography.

One of the best European films to include in our season might be Ken Russell's *The Devils* (1971). It's usually thought of as an attack on religion, but is as much an exposé of its latent sexuality. More than any of our films so far, it seems to say that being turned on to god is like being turned on by bodies. The heightening of feeling is tumescent. Religion as an engorgement of faith.

Perhaps it's not surprising that in the country whose god danced the world into existence, cinema is full of frenzied sacred-sexual moments

Outside Africa and Europe, what might our final few films be? Do we include the ending of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958)? It is certainly sexual and religious, and about spiralling upwards (or downwards?). And Martin Scorsese has long been great at the ecstatic, but with sex as a shadow, an anima. In Latin America, Alejandro Jodorowsky's *Santa Sangre* (1989) dials up Dionysianism as far as it can go, and Glauber Rocha's *Black God, White Devil* (1964) is vengeful, symbolist and at times ecstatic. And to use the word 'ecstatic' is to think of Sergei Eisenstein. If Marxist-Leninism was a religion, then films like *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *October* (1928) are tumultuous, and sometimes homoerotic hosannas.

But the best fit for this theme is Indian cinema, appropriate given my use of the word 'masala' above. Perhaps it's not surprising that in the country whose god Shiva danced the world into existence, and where in the holiest of holy sanctuaries of some Hindu temples there are yonis and lingams, cinema is full of frenzied sacred-sexual moments. There are many in the movies of its most famous actor, Amitabh Bachchan, such as *Zanjeer* (1973), *Sholay* (1975) and *Deewar* (1975). Typically playing a working-class anti-hero, Bachchan at times is as cool as Steve McQueen, but eventually a dam bursts, the cutting gets faster, the zooms more propulsive, the music more baroque. In such cases the films start to resemble the metal-clanging, operatic, enacted rituals of Hindu temples. The aim of both is to dial down reason, to adrenalise, to exalt and terrify with the power of feeling. Maybe that's what the engorgement is – intoxication? An unfettered self-release into a state, a zone, which could be called religious or sexual?

Music and cinema are good at that zone. They are sensory, unreasoning and multitudinous. Let's do this film season, in a sleazy cinema with red curtains if possible.

ILLUSTRATION BY NATE KITCH

PREVIEW

THE OTHER OF INVENTION

Ana Mendieta's brief, visceral films transcend boundaries – between earth and air, human and animal, self and other

By Becca Voelcker

Artist and filmmaker Ana Mendieta's film *Weather Balloon, Feathered Balloon* (1974) is a poem for floating and falling, for the fullness of a balloon in the sky, and for the lightness of the feathers that fly from it as it bursts. Made a decade before her untimely death, *Weather Balloon* closed a recent programme of Mendieta's films that I curated with Haden Guest at the Harvard Film Archive. Mendieta's Super 8 films seldom last longer than three minutes – each film the length of a reel. *Weather Balloon*'s pictorial vivacity and mingling of earthly, atmospheric and animal elements can be traced throughout Mendieta's work.

Typically shown in gallery installations, Mendieta's explosive and slight films pose a challenge for cinema programming: how many films can an audience see before saturation, before needing to breathe? (Mendieta works with these very constraints in her films, submerging herself in rivers, grass and mud.) We decided on 12 films and a short intermission. Pauses between each film were breath marks in the dark.

Feathers appeared earlier in the programme, in *Chicken Movie, Chicken Piece* (1972), in which Mendieta holds a beheaded chicken close to her naked body as it flails and, eventually, comes to rest. In *Mirage* (1974), she appears to pluck feathers from her own stomach. Insulation, weathering, decoration and means of flight, feathers are also a way for Mendieta to portray herself as another. Clothing herself in another's skin, plumage or fur, she signals an empathy that transcends species.

In a suite of photographs from 1972, *Untitled (Cosmetic Facial Variations)*, Mendieta fashions herself a beard; in her film *Dog* (1974) she nears the camera on all fours, wearing the skin of a dog like a jacket. In these works Mendieta seems to get so close to the 'other' that she receives power from it. The title of her 1975 work *Energy Charge* enunciates this. *Energy Charge* and the same year's *Butterfly* use video technology as a form of power. In *Butterfly*, Mendieta stands naked before a static video camera, wearing feathered wings. Inputting the footage into a 16-channel processor, she assigned bright colours to light-reflecting objects, creating a posterised effect that was reshot in Super 8. Here, technology (and bird feathers) charge Mendieta's body with a hovering, electronic otherness.

Elsewhere, Mendieta becomes part of the landscape. In *Grass Breathing* (1974), the camera observes a patch of grass that rises and falls as Mendieta lies underneath it, her breathing increasingly heavy. *Genesis (Buried in Mud)* (1975) sees Mendieta similarly submerged, its title marking the earth as a place of both formation and interment. Begun in 1974, Mendieta's *Silueta* series consists of films and photographs of her silhouette, outlined, covered or filled in with soil, leaves, blood, gunpowder and cloth. The series is a typology of gestures: raised arms denote the proximity of earth and sky, a figure in water the

Theatre of blood: (clockwise from top left) *Chicken Movie, Chicken Piece* (1972), *Blood Writing* (1974), *Butterfly* (1975) and *Dog* (1974)

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nearness of land and sea. Mendieta called her *Silueta* pieces 'earth-body works,' hyphenating site and subject, landscape and portrait.

In each *silueta*, identity is both vulnerable to and nurtured by its surroundings. This complex relationship with place goes back to Mendieta's childhood in Cuba and her immigration to the US in 1961, aged 12. Settling in Iowa, with its landlocked cornfields and enormous skies, Mendieta was profoundly affected by experiences of place, belonging and difference. Intimate with yet removed from an island geography and a heritage of Catholicism, Afro-Cuban ritual and the pantheistic Santería religion, Mendieta made her own communions with place. She travelled frequently to rural Mexico, finding inspiration in funerary sites, and staged many *siluetas* there. Iowa, meanwhile, offered expansive space: the yellow cornfields on which the balloon's feathers fall are unmistakably those of the American Midwest. The term 'border cinema' usually refers to films that explore geographical and political boundaries, but Mendieta's dig deeper, asking: "Where is my edge?" Like blood seeping into soil beneath an earth-based *silueta*, or water gushing over one made in a riverbed, the question escapes definition.

The mingling of elements in Mendieta's films is not romanticised. Landscapes and bodies are as muddy, combustible and bloody as they are harmonious. They appear both dangerous and endangered, creating an ecological diagram of mutual cause and effect. Mendieta's relation with animals in her films is complex. *Chicken Movie, Chicken Piece* was her first work to feature blood, and is one of the most startling. Viewers of ethnographic film may be familiar with animal sacrifice, but the shock registered on Mendieta's face as she is handed the newly decapitated chicken (Mendieta was a vegetarian) bathes the scene in anxiety. Two cameras were used, reels spliced together so that we see the death twice. Repetition from a different camera or angle (a technique also used in *Weather Balloon*) meditates on the doubles in Mendieta's work, which include self and other, life and death, sacred and profane, and performance and film. Mendieta used chicken or pig blood in subsequent work, sometimes explicitly, and sometimes to represent human blood. In *Blood + Feathers* (1974), she stands beside a creek in Iowa and pours a bucket of blood over her shoulders, before rolling in chicken feathers. There is another double or dialectic here, of dying and birth. As the sun dapples on Mendieta's bloodstained body, she hatches from the ground covered in white down.

Blood + Feathers, the *Silueta* works and many others began as brief performances for the camera, witnessed by a handful of students and friends. These fugitive impressions on the age-old earth lasted seconds (for firework and gunpowder-filled silhouettes) or at most months (until rain or leaf-fall obscured them). Mendieta's breath, the frame rate of her camera, and the length of each reel add additional temporal layers, extended posthumously in the filmic and photographic 'trace'. The *Silueta* films literally observe three minutes of silence, in appreciation of animal, environmental and mechanical times. The films' marking of multifarious paces was palpable at

I see a little silueta: images from Ana Mendieta's *Silueta* series (1974-80)

Harvard Film Archive where, unlike in a gallery installation through which visitors pass, the seated audience experienced these times together.

Although Mendieta's work is sometimes likened to land art, its sensitivity to ephemeral materiality distinguishes it from more monumental (and largely male-authored) earthworks. Precisely by not taking up too much time or space, her work performs an art-historical and feminist critique. Mendieta's documentation formats are not monumental. Often handheld and silent, of short duration and terrestrial, her films contrast with Robert Smithson's aerial film of his *Spiral Jetty*, for example. Even the ancient goddess forms Mendieta carved into rock faces in Mexico from 1978 onwards were organic shapes, diminutive in scale, and soon eroded or overgrown – in contrast to the ordered and linear landscape interventions of her husband, Carl Andre. Mendieta's is an ecological practice which suggests that, as the earth returns to its former state and shrouds her silhouettes and traces, the human or animal body will join the earth some day.

Despite their lightness of touch, Mendieta's films are robust witnesses – both to her performances and, indirectly, to violence against women. They often arose from senses of rage and displacement, and provoke shock as well as contemplation. Distressed by news reports in Iowa City that included the rape and murder of a young woman, Mendieta made several films using blood and public space. For *Moffitt Building Piece* (1973), she arranged some blood as if it had run from inside a building on to the pavement. Shot from a parked car, the film observes passers-by who ignore, stare at – or, in one case, use an umbrella to poke at – the pool of blood. *Blood Writing* (1974) opens with a static frontal shot of white barn doors, before which Mendieta stands with her back to us. In crimson (chicken blood?), she daubs SHE GOT – and as she paints each letter, her body shields it from view. What did 'she' get? Lucky? Killed? What she deserved? Mendieta continues: L O – lost? LOVE. Standing back to examine her work, Mendieta invites us to dwell on the elliptical uppercase declaration. SHE GOT LOVE. Painted the colour of Valentine's gifts and bloody violence, 'love' is used as a concrete noun or perhaps a verb, dynamic and aggressive. Mendieta's shadow, cast on the door, becomes a signature, and recalls a *silueta*.

Mendieta's slight films pose a challenge for programmers: how many can an audience see before saturation?

One film from the Harvard programme lingers in my mind. *Parachute* (1973), shot in black-and-white video with sync sound, feels as open and light as its title suggests. It was filmed from an upper-floor classroom of the Iowa elementary school at which Mendieta taught. The film observes a circle of children in the playground below. They hold a parachute over their heads and cause it to balloon in the air as they run inwards towards each other. As they rush out again, the parachute opens flat. Each time the children charge inwards we hear their voiced delight. Watching *Parachute* in the cinema auditorium, the audience expressed similar pleasure. The film ends as the children scatter across the playground (like feathers in a cornfield). As the audience dispersed into the night, I thought about the word parachute: para – 'protection against', chute – 'fall'. Knowledge – or rather, a lack thereof – of the circumstances of Mendieta's fatal fall from an apartment window in 1985 casts a prophetic light over her work with feathers, balloons and parachutes. But her films live on, buoyant and charged with energy.

Two programmes of Ana Mendieta's short films will be screened at Tate Modern, London, on 20 January 2018. See tate.org.uk for more information

THE SMORGASBORD JUNGLE

This year's silent film festival in Pordenone ranged wider than ever before – but a little focus would have been even better

By Geoff Brown

The first film to tickle my fancy in Pordenone was *The Scapegrace*, a British western of 1913, shot in the wilds of Croydon in South London. Every character wore a hat, a rickety bridge put in a melodramatic appearance, and the gold-mining landscape was charmingly hemmed in by a sturdy hedge. This two-reel valentine from a faraway world, decent enough for its time and place, paved the way towards a week's worth of celluloid so varied in subject matter and style that the viewer – well, this viewer – was left feeling pleasured, breathless and bewildered, sometimes all at once.

Sitting in the Teatro Verdi, the wide world of silent cinema may have been my oyster, but I was always only allowed the quickest of gulps. One programme strand briefly surveyed the human wreckage of World War I. Another quickly looked at weather-beaten explorers seeking exotic nonfiction around the world. Three Pola Negri features (I cried for more); two from Japan; European westerns; piles of short comedies. This 36th Giornate del Cinema Muto was the second under Jay Weissberg's directorship: within the profusion of topics, it was easy to spot his refreshing and necessary wish to expand the Giornate's gaze and peer deeper into the small quotient of surviving silent films (25 per cent perhaps of those made , according to the Library of Congress). But even an expanded gaze needs a focus, and this festival's dizzying kaleidoscope forcibly reminded me that the Giornate's really memorable editions have had a dominating topic – Dziga Vertov, say, or Louis Feuillade, or Yevgeni Bauer – the stylish director prised from the treasure chest of Russian films made before 1917. It's harder to have fond memories of a smorgasbord.

Among such esoteric items as Norwegian ethnographic shorts made in Africa, Weissberg dropped in more familiar items such as *The Crowd* (1928), King Vidor's expressionistic homage to ordinary lives, and the timeless avant-garde poetry of Dimitri Kirsanov's Paris symphony, *Ménilmontant* (1926). And individual films still stuck out, sometimes in part through the power of their musical accompaniments from the festival's usual crack team and guests. Stripped of the driving minimalist folk-rock score by Ukrainian composer Anton Baibakov, the faults of Mikhail Kaufman's *An Unprecedented Campaign* (1931) – repetition, bare propaganda for the joys of Stalin's first Five-Year Plan – might have screamed for attention. But the music, gustily performed by the Anton Baibakov Collective, drove us onwards through the dance of images both industrial and human, assembled and photographed with the verve expected from Kaufman, the brother of Dziga Vertov and cameraman for *Man with a Movie Camera*.

Gems with more polish lay about, particularly in a Scandinavian section devoted to lesser-known product of the 1920s. True, it was hard to warm to Anders Wilhelm Sandberg's *Morænen* (*The House of Shadows*), a 1924 Danish drama of family strife launched on its way with the festival's gloomiest intertitle – "Glowing sun, I hate you!" Yet the film's technical sheen and use of landscapes always hit the spot; and you'd need to be dead not to be stirred by the Norwegian vistas of Carl Theodor Dreyer's *The Bride of Glomdal* (*Glomdalsbruden*), made in 1925, a couple of years before the Danish director stunned the world with the ascetic miracle of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928). The story fitted the familiar Scandinavian skeleton of intergenerational conflicts, rural hardships, and the clash between rich and poor. But there was no time to worry about bare bones when Dreyer and his cameraman Einar Olsen sculpted emotionally resonant images from stark hills and roaring river, or when Tove Bellback, splendid as the rich farmer's daughter determined to marry a lowly 'peasant', lit up the screen with her piercing gaze, alternately sorrowing and feisty. As for the wedding day finale, with her intended helplessly drifting towards a watery grave, you'd have to go back to the ice-floe sequence in D.W. Griffith's *Way Down East* (1920) to find comparably nail-biting melodrama.

The week was so varied in subject and style that the viewer was left feeling pleasured, breathless and bewildered, sometimes all at once

Laughter was generally in short supply, certainly in the over-stretched programmes devoted to comedy shorts featuring supposedly subversive 'nasty women'. Time was much better spent with Weissberg's own thoughtful strand on the effects of the Great War on minds, bodies, buildings and cultures, a mix of nonfiction and fiction curated with a conscious awareness of the parallel war atrocities of today. Children stunted by malnutrition, communities flattened into rubble, the crudities of early artificial limbs: even after a century of horrors, these sights did not make comfortable viewing. But compassion and warmth were also on hand, in the 1918 French film *Petite Simone*, when the housekeeper's five-year-old daughter shadowed the footsteps of the blinded hero, keeping him safe as he inched towards his true love and a happy ending. Among this festival's jittery whirlwind, that sweet memory will remain.

The binned of war: André Deed as Cretinetti in the Italian comedy *The Fear of Zeppelins* (1915), part of Pordenone's Great War strand

ILLUSTRATION BY MICK BROWNFIELD WWW.MICKBROWNFIELD.COM

FESTIVAL

ADVENTURES IN BANDIT COUNTRY

Local heroes: Margaret Salmon's *Mm* is a 35mm portrait of a single match of the Berwick Bandits, a local speedway team celebrating its 50th anniversary

Berwick-upon-Tweed's film festival has become an international destination, but still manages to stay true to local roots

By Erika Balsom

Working in collaboration with a small team, Peter Taylor, director of the Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival, is quickly transforming the picturesque town of Berwick-upon-Tweed into a major destination for artists' cinema. This year – the 13th edition, and the third under his galvanising leadership – the multi-strand programme went from strength to strength, confronting festival-goers with tough choices. Make time to see James N. Kienitz Wilkins's *Mediums* (2017) installed in a municipal building or attend one of three 35mm screenings of Uzbek filmmaker Ali Khamraev? Stick with the back-to-back experimental classics of a Peggy Ahwesh retrospective or discover a new favourite in the juried competition, like *Dislocation Blues* (2017), Sky Hopinka's prize-winning reflection on the Standing Rock native American reservation?

Two of the strongest works on view were festival commissions by Glasgow-based artists Charlotte Prodger and Margaret Salmon. Distinct in approach and medium, both engage extensively with the specificity of place and the lived experience of gender and sexuality.

Produced as the outcome of her time as the festival's artist-in-residence, Prodger's 25-minute video *LHB* (2017) carries forward the artist's established concerns with landscape, technology and desire. Leaving behind the metropolitan settings that most often ground representations of queer life, Prodger imagines an expansive rural geography, linking the 4,279 kilometres of the Pacific Coast Trail with her train travel and walks in Scotland and Northumberland. By no means a retreat into a timeless nature, *LHB* delves into the affects of networked existence: in voice-over, Prodger recounts her obsessive fascination with the Instagram accounts of lesbians hiking the Pacific Coast Trail, and describes lying in bed, tabbing back and forth between gay porn and blog posts about strategies for coping with the arduous hike, like women's use of bandanas to wipe themselves after urinating.

If the diaristic voice-over of *LHB* evokes the distant landscapes of the American West, its images anchor Prodger closer to home, exploiting the textures and operations of digital imaging technologies in capturing the terrain of Scotland and Northumberland. Prodger finds intimacy and agility in the iPhone camera, using it to embed the production of images within everyday rhythms. She does not seek to reproduce fully the experience of her walks; this would only ever fail. Instead, she distils their representation to a single action, repeated with variations: framed from the knees down,

In 'LHB' Prodger recounts her obsessive fascination with the Instagram accounts of lesbians hiking the Pacific Coast Trail

Charlotte Prodger's *LHB*

women squat to piss in the landscape. The act of marking territory – patriarchal, animal – is reclaimed for another habitus, another politics.

Margaret Salmon's *Mm* is a 35mm portrait of a single match of the Berwick Bandits, a local speedway team celebrating its 50th anniversary. Shown to a sold-out crowd of over 200, evidently populated by many Bandits fans, the premiere of *Mm* recalled the local film, one of the most popular genres of the pre-World War I era. Local films were shot within a particular community, often at a special event, and then projected for those who appear within them, enabling the special pleasure of encountering one's own experience as image. During the screening of *Mm*, audience members pointed out people they recognised, gasping with a mixture of pleasure and shock when, near the film's end, Salmon follows a Bandit into the changing room where he removes his racing outfit and showers with his teammates.

The local films of early cinema were of limited interest outside their site of production. Despite its kinship with this genre, there is little risk of the same being true of *Mm*, which will resonate far beyond Berwick as a tremendously accomplished work exploring gender, sport and spectacle. Salmon's gorgeous cinematography is periodically accompanied by a rhythmic female voiceover that unfolds a chain of associations beginning with the letter M: mystery, mythology, masculine, motorbike, move. The voice is playful, never assigning a fixed meaning to the image, but providing a loose framework within which to apprehend the sexual politics of Salmon's subject. The Bandits are an all-male team, invested in a certain idea of masculinity. Their motto? "No brakes, no gears, no fear." Salmon casts a female gaze on this male space, finding within it a logic of normativity she is keen to challenge, and manifesting an attentiveness to the grace, adornment and comportment of male bodies that offers her a means of doing so.

A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

The frenetic power of Josh and Benny Safdie's 'Good Time' rests on a superb hyperactive performance by Robert Pattinson as a smalltime crook on a nighttime odyssey through the mean streets of New York seeking to rescue his brother from the clutches of the law

By Nick Pinkerton

Spoiler alert: this article reveals key plot details

"Morality isn't exactly in sync with instinct," says Josh Safdie, a fast talker, who is jawing with me on the phone about *Good Time*, a movie that moves at the instinctual speed of fight-or-flight. Co-directed by Josh and his brother Benny, *Good Time* is as pure a piece of filmmaking in an adrenal vein as has been seen since the heyday of the late, great Tobe Hooper, following with Adderall jitters on the trail of a low-level grifter and once-and-future convict named Constantine 'Connie' Nikas as he manoeuvres his way out of one jam after another. Aside from a rueful coda which closes the movie, the entire thing might be taking place over one hectic 24-hour period.

We first meet Connie as he butts his way into what appears to be a court-appointed therapy session for his brother, Nick, who speaks slowly and as though with a swollen tongue, and who very obviously has some form of learning disability. This doesn't disqualify him in Connie's eyes for the role of accomplice in a bank robbery, but the job gets bungled and Nick gets nicked and finally lands himself in the hospital. Connie, working on the run and on the fly, cooks up a line of bullshit to bust his brother out, but when he belatedly discovers that he's grabbed the wrong bandaged-up felon by accident, he turns around and strikes up a business proposition with his rescuee to find and sell a 20 oz Sprite bottle full of liquid acid – another link in the causal chain of accident and adjustment that keeps the movie going right up until it nosedives into hard project concrete.

Dragged along on the heels of one unsuccessful scheme after another, *Good Time* plays as a morbidly funny comedy of errors. It is also a character study of sorts, offering three portraits of men cracking under pressure. Benny, who also co-edited the movie with co-writer Ronald Bronstein, plays Nick, the character who bookends the film, and acts as its troubled conscience. Ray, the banged-up crook who Connie pulls out of

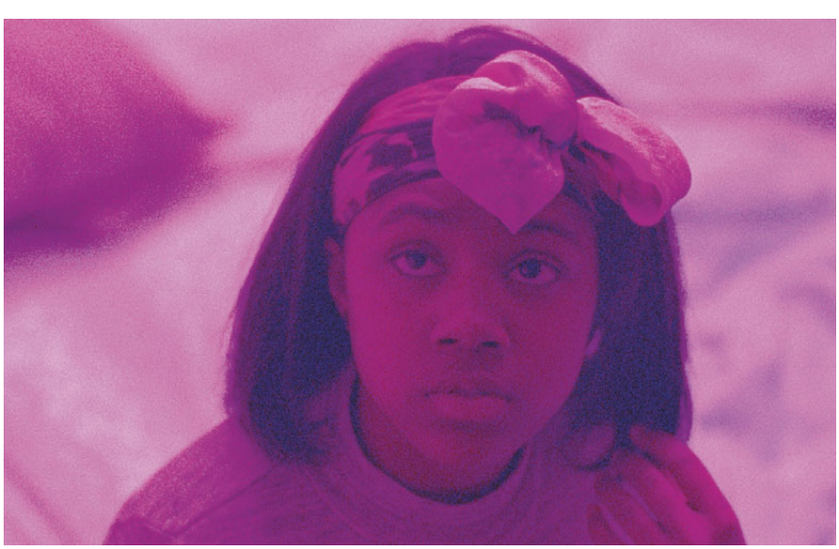
AMERICAN HUSTLE
Robert Pattinson plays Connie Nikas, an ex-convict pinballing from one calamity to the next, in Josh and Benny Safdie's *Good Time*

the hospital, is played by Buddy Duress, a former heroin addict and Rikers Island inmate who first appeared before a camera in the Safdies' 2014 film *Heaven Knows What*, and who has the best delivery of the word 'bro' of any living actor. Duress is working opposite one Robert Pattinson, who is one of the most internationally recognisable sets of cheekbones to emerge out of movies over the past decade, and who is at no point privileged by the camera in a way that seems to acknowledge this.

Good Time is a New York City movie. Being a New York City movie is something very distinct from just being a movie set in New York, which every other recent American film seems to be. When it comes to grounding the narrative in the geographical, political, historical and demographic reality of the five boroughs of the city, however, most films go about as far as an establishing drone shot of the Manhattan skyline. New Yorkers born and raised, the Safdies have always shown a deeper interest in capturing the finer shadings of local colour. *Good Time*, for example, prominently features a commercial for Cellino & Barnes, personal injury attorneys who appear to have bought up approximately half of all ad airtime and billboard space in the city, and features a cameo appearance by local cable news channel NY1 evening news presenter Lewis Dodley. "When he agreed to do the movie it was more exciting than when Rob Pattinson agreed to do it," says Josh. "I've just always thought regional culture was so much more interesting than national culture. The micro ends up being the macro."

As I spoke to Josh, he was in the middle of the process of moving out of the Harlem apartment he's occupied for the last six-and-a-half years. The move doesn't seem to have been precipitated by recent meteoric success. "My ceiling fell in and almost killed my girlfriend," he tells me. "I had a lot of really intense run-ins with my landlord, including one where he said, 'I don't know if this is how Jews do their business.'"

It is tempting to say that the Safdies make movies about the 'real' New York City, but like any great metropolis, it is large enough to contain a multitude of realities. Perhaps it's closer to the mark to say that the Safdies make movies set in the particular New York City where your ceiling almost caves in on your girlfriend and your landlord calls you a Jew. (Or whatever the appropriate slur may be.) The film is the Safdies' third fiction feature, and like those preceding it stakes out a very specific corner of the city: *Daddy Longlegs* (2009) centred on Midtown East; *Heaven Knows What* around Sherman Square and Riverside Park; while their long-in-gestation *Uncut Gems* will revolve around the Diamond District on 47th Street. *Good Time* casts a wider net. It's a Queens movie, largely laying its scene in the biggest, most populous and most diverse borough. While it doesn't have quite the same brand prestige as Manhattan or Brooklyn, it is not without a certain allure to location scouts, who like to use it to double for somewhere other than New York. (I used to always see trucks for the CBS TV show *The Good Wife* around my neighbourhood, Woodside, which was evidently standing in for Chicago.) A few movies have filmed Queens for Queens with effect though, including two movies that share something of the breathless pace of *Good Time*, Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man* (1956), shot in part in Jackson Heights and Ridgewood, and Jaume Collet-Serra's *Run All Night* (2015), in the old Trump powerbase of Woodhaven.



BABY DRIVER
High-school student Crystal, played by Taliah Webster (below), is co-opted as a driver by Connie Nikas (Robert Pattinson, opposite left) in a scheme to retrieve a bottle of acid to earn money to help him get his brother Nick (Benny Safdie, opposite right) out on bail

The Safdies grew up in the borough, on what Josh describes as "the urban side of Queens Boulevard, in Forest Hills", the home turf of the Ramones. If you are under the impression that the Ramones' use of soda fountains and sock hop imagery is the work of tongue-in-cheek big city hipsters taking the piss out of cornball Americana, you very likely have never been to the actual Forest Hills, which to this day maintains an excellent soda fountain scene. And *Good Time* is set specifically in those parts of Queens where the urban begins to shade into the suburban: the bank job goes down in Chinese Flushing; much of the film's action is set in Rego Park, though shot in Middle Village; and at one point there's an excursion to Adventureland, a rinky-tink 1960s-vintage theme park smack in the heart of Long Island's Nassau County.

"It's one of the only parts of the city that kind of demands having a car," Josh notes of the Rego Park/Middle Village/Forest Hills area, set in the crook of the elbow formed by the Long Island Expressway and Grand Central Parkway. Transportation contingencies are, appropriately, vital to *Good Time*, which may be the first movie ever made in which a character beats a retreat by way of a bus from Access-A-Ride – a New York programme for transporting the disabled. Afterwards Connie gets his foot in the door of the home of an older Haitian woman schooled in the ways of the good Samaritan, then pulls an about-face from his innocent lamb act to seduce and sweet-talk her high-school-age granddaughter Crystal into driving him around town.

Crystal is played by Taliah Webster, whose performance straddles a difficult and very believable balance of world-weary braggadocio and romantic schoolgirl credulity. This is Webster's first movie, and to this point, the Safdies have worked with mostly non-professionals and character actors: friends like Bronstein, who starred in *Daddy Longlegs*; street-casting discoveries like *Heaven Knows What* stars Duress and Arielle Holmes, whose autobiography provided the source material for the movie; or the husky rapper-cum-actor Necro, back here after a significant role in that movie. Of filming with unknown performers, Josh says there's "that element of discovering the character as you discover their face", but with a celebrity of Pattinson's magnitude, that route was closed: "You understand how their face works, because it's been overexposed."

Having a legitimate star sign on to one of their films was a development with the potential to change everything about the Safdies' practice. Their response was to change nothing at all. The idea, says Josh, was to "create the illusion that he was street cast. We're not going to alter our ethos and our philosophy, so let's try to align them with this actor." This was achieved through an enormous amount of preparation. Before the run-and-gun shoot, Pattinson came to New York to immerse himself in a long process of character-building, trying to get into the skin of ex-con Connie. He read the diaries written in prison by Duress, who plays his opposite number in the movie. (After coming out of Rikers, the 32-year-old Duress did a spell of acting classes, which Josh notes may give him more formal training than Pattinson.) He drafted letters to the Nick character in the voice of Connie, as though written from the stir. And he went on character research expeditions, including a visit to an active prison. "I think for Rob it was embarrassing for him to be who he was in a situation like that," says Josh. "Because there's still this public perception of him as a pretty vampire. He was worried about that. So he had to learn on his feet, to carry himself like Connie to avoid the embarrassment of his own insecurities. I always think that's the best way to get into a character, just to go out and start being them. Not in a corny Method way, but to really raise the stakes. So that a failure isn't a bad take, a failure is an embarrassment.

"We had to convince ourselves that this was a real guy – that we knew this person really well," he continues. "Because unlike on *Heaven Knows What*, at any point the lead can't draw from a life of character development." This meant reams of notes on backstory, for Connie and for everyone around him, and it was these notes that eventually brought another legitimate star to the movie, Jennifer Jason Leigh, who creates a detailed miniature characterisation as a spoiled arrested development case who's in thrall to Connie. ("I sent her a ten-page couple biography, which was as long as the script pages the character had: how she met Connie and what the state of their relationship was," says Josh.) Long hard prep was followed by a quick, hard shoot, averaging 15-hour days. The movie was done incognito, registered under assumed names, in order to avoid paparazzi and street hassle, though among a small subset of New York cinephiles it was the talk of the town. Through sheer laziness I missed an invite to meet Eric Roberts, who was on set for one night to play a Queens bail bondsman. By the time the movie was done, the part had been reshot with an actual Queens bail bondsman.

When *Good Time* was accepted into competition at Cannes, it was a vindication not only for the Safdies, but for a whole strain of grimy NYC independent filmmaking that's been going on through the course of the 21st century. One key figure in this is Bronstein, referred to by Josh as a "third brother", a former film projectionist who has worked in collaboration with the Safdies since releasing his lone feature to date, *Frownland* (2007), a comedy of smothering mortification whose uncomfortably immersive style the Safdies appear to have learned much from. A pure cult item, *Frownland* was close to a decade in its excruciating making, its follow-up still somewhere on the far horizon. According to Josh, Bronstein found that "the world wouldn't bend to the difficult, lonely process that made *Frownland*," but he surmises that in the younger Safdies, Bronstein saw a "determination" that he could work with and through, and "use to his own advantage". When asked to quantify Bronstein's contribution to their films, Josh says: "It's ineffable. He'll come at it with a scepticism that's so important, to make sure that every idea is completely scrutinised, to

There's still this public perception of Robert Pattinson as a pretty vampire. He was worried about that. So he had to learn on his feet, to carry himself like Connie

the point where we argue in ways that would destroy certain people's friendship, just scream at each other." Throughout our conversation Josh refers to the sometimes diverging opinions he, Ronnie and Benny have about the film's characters, as though they weren't inventions but actual acquaintances.

Another key player is cinematographer Sean Price Williams, who helped to steer *Frownland* through its long gestation, shot both *Heaven Knows What* and *Good Time* on Super 16mm, and is also in no small way responsible for the placid, plaintive mood of Michael Almereyda's recent *Marjorie Prime*. Of their relationship, Josh says: "I slave over a shot list, I just write down every single shot that I would imagine in the edit. But Sean doesn't really like to sit down; he likes to do. He's a poet, and he's the greatest operator I've ever met, and an incredible cinematographer. But preparation, he doesn't like it. It makes him depressed. Somebody told me he said once, 'Did Fassbinder ever go on a tech scout?' When the truth is that he probably did. But that's why Sean's so great on documentary. He's an artist of reaction."

These reflexes give *Good Time* something of its sense of urgency, its feeling of something that is just haphazardly *happening*, while its controlled colour palette betrays the fact that an intelligent visual design is at work. After an opening which Josh describes as "antiseptic and bureaucratic-looking", the movie is gradually infiltrated by garish, ghoulish colours which seem to reflect the delusional state of Connie's panicked mind. This begins with the explosion of a pink dye-bag in the immediate aftermath of the bank job, then continues through the Haitian woman's house, illuminated by television screens and fridge lights, and into the bowels of an Adventureland dark ride. (The movie is largely nocturnal; describing it, Josh drops the name of a new track by the musician Ariel Pink: 'Nighttime Is Great!') "I don't think we ever said, 'That's too far'," remembers Josh, talking of setting up lights with Williams and gaffer Danny April.

Colour plays a major role in *Good Time* in another sense as well. While not addressed explicitly, race is a constant presence in the movie: it's in the rubber masks Connie and Nick wear on their caper, which disguise them as black men; in the social mores of the prison television room, which Nick violates in ignorance; it's even in the calculations that register in Connie's eyes when he sees a black Santa Claus decoration outside a house. Connie is white, while many people he deals with – his Haitian Samaritan, the Access-A-Ride operator – are not. Connie is also a hustler, which means that he considers all the angles, always, and will pass up no opportunity to turn whatever he has at hand to his advantage, including his race. In Josh's mind, this is a lesson Connie has learned from time inside: "In a strange way, Connie sees the matrix of society. He saw the segregation in prison. So when he gets out, he can only see what he's learned, which is in the prison system. It's in his actions, it's in his DNA."

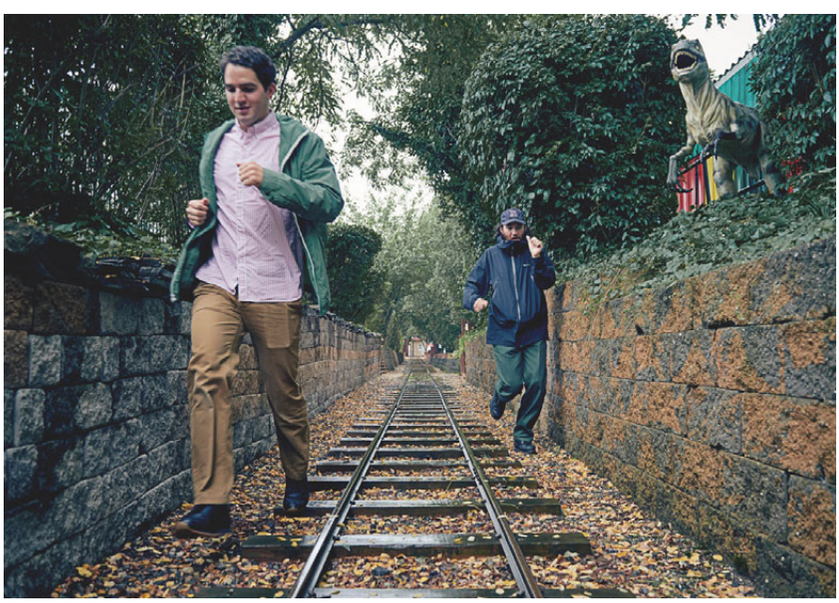
I slave over a shot list. But Sean doesn't really like to sit down. He's an incredible cinematographer. But preparation, he doesn't like it. He said once, 'Did Fassbinder ever go on a tech scout?'

In perhaps the most queasy scene in a movie with a few of them, Connie is seen bum-rushing, beating and drugging an Adventureland security guard, played by Somali-born *Captain Phillips* actor Barkhad Abdi, then using his uniform to get out of a scrape with the cops, who haul off the insensate black man instead. Says Josh: "Writing, we were in a jam. We said, 'How can he realistically get out of this scenario? He's surrounded.' But, two white cops walking into an amusement park in the middle of the night, maybe they wouldn't ask a lot of questions if the guy on the ground was black and the person wearing the security guard uniform was white. We realised this, and we said, 'This is fucked, because this could work.'"

Of course that is fucked and it could work – the rubber masks, incidentally, were the same ones used by Conrad Zdzierak in a 2010 Cincinnati bank job, manufactured by SPFXmasks of Van Nuys, California – but God forbid you be insufficiently explicit in your high moral dudgeon in this age, for which crime *Good Time* was slapped with a bad faith pan in the *New York Times*. Part of the excitement of the movie, and the Safdies' project in general, is their willingness to approach such touchy subject matter without first building guard rails around it, trusting the intelligence and sensitivity of their audience rather than pandering and staying within the good liberal comfort zone. More inspiring still, the film is refreshingly free of neurosis with regards to any perceived conflict between its neo-neorealistic and stylised impulses, one of the many phony dichotomies whose calcification has given us the sclerotic film culture with which we struggle today. For all its attention to lived-in detail, *Good Time* doesn't disdain the cinematic gesture, including the employment of aerial photography, a front-forward electronic score by Oneohtrix Point Never, and downright intrusive opening and closing credit sequences.

In the first instance, says Josh, the idea was to "demean the exposition", which is mercilessly compacted in a few minutes of screentime. In the second, which reunites us with Nick, now abandoned to group care, it was something very different. "Closing credits," he says, "by telling an audience that the movie is over, there's something emotional that happens there. We wanted to make sure you had that feeling into a scene, arguably the most important scene in the movie. It also gives you the permission to walk out. To walk out on this guy who keeps getting walked out on." It's here that the movie's rush fades into a lingering ache – the moment, precisely, when slow and steady morality pulls past racing instinct. S

***Good Time* is released in UK cinemas on 17 November and is reviewed on page 67**



NEW YORK STORIES
In all their films, New York directors Benny (below left) and Josh Safdie (below right) have shown an interest in capturing the distinctive flavour of life in the city

PHOTOGRAPHY BY VINCENT TULLO/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX/EYEVINE

Silver Bear
67 Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin
Jury Grand Prix
★★★★
'A POWERFUL DEPICTION OF LIFE, LOVE, AND LOSS IN THE CITY OF KINSHASA'
LITTLE WHITE LIES
'INTENSELY PERFORMED AND LOADED WITH ENERGY'
THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER
IN CINEMAS NOVEMBER 10
FÉLICITÉ
A FILM BY ALAIN GOMIS
VÉRO TSHANDA BEYA
PAPI MPAKA
GAETAN CLAUDIA
KASAI ALLSTARS
SCRIPT ALAIN GOMIS IN ASSOCIATION WITH DELPHINE ZINGG AND OLIVIER LOUSTAU PHOTOGRAPHY CÉLINE BOZON SOUND BENOÎT DE CLERCK SOUND MIX JEAN-PIERRE LAFORCE EDITING ALAIN GOMIS, FABRICE ROUAUD ASSISTANT DIRECTORS DEMBA DIEYE, DELPHINE DAULL PRODUCED BY ARNAUD DOMMERC, ALAIN GOMIS AND OUMAR SALL CO-PRODUCED BY ANNE-LAURE GUÉGAN, GÉRALDINE SPRIMONT, VANESSA CISZEWSKI, GEORGES SCHOUCAIR MUSICAL COORDINATION ANOUK KHELIFA ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK KASAI ALLSTARS, KINSHASA SYMPHONIC ORCHESTRA INTERNATIONAL SALES JOUR2FÊTE
MUBI

LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE

Following the success of his iPhone-shot buddy movie 'Tangerine', Sean Baker returns with another tale of lives blighted by poverty in 'The Florida Project', depicting the adventures of six-year-old Moonee, who lives in a run-down motel in the shadow of Disney World

By Philip Concannon

On 15 November 1965, Walt Disney held a press conference to announce the commencement of 'The Florida Project'. Previously known as 'Project X', this top-secret plan had involved his company quietly purchasing 43 square miles of land in Orlando for the purpose of building his "city of the future", which would later evolve into Walt Disney World. While Disney's theme parks remain a fantasy destination for millions of tourists every year, the harsh economic realities of life in 21st-century America have seen many of the surrounding neighbourhoods fall into disrepair.

Sean Baker's *The Florida Project* takes place in the colourful but shabby Magic Castle motel in Kissimmee, which is largely populated by residents living from week to week. These are the city's hidden homeless; families who may technically have a roof over their heads, but who know that one missed rental payment could force them on to the streets. It's a precarious situation, but Baker's film possesses a bracing sense of humour and optimism, as we are aligned with the perspective of six-year-old Moonee (Brooklynn Prince), who lives in The Magic Castle with her mother Halley (newcomer Bria Vinaite, whom Baker discovered on Instagram). For Moonee and her young friends, living in the shadow of "The Happiest Place on Earth", every day is an adventure, with their innocence and imagination keeping the bleakness of their poverty-stricken surroundings at bay.

RUNNING ON EMPTY
Bria Vinaite as Halley and Brooklynn Prince as her daughter Moonee, in Sean Baker's *The Florida Project*, whose bracing sense of humour and optimism helps soften some of the bleaker aspects of the tale

We were looking for the audience to have the senses of a child, with slightly heightened colours and shooting from a kid's eyeline or below, making them big and powerful, the kings of their domain

In films such as *Take Out* (2004), *Prince of Broadway* (2008) and *Tangerine* (2015), Baker has been drawn to marginalised characters and communities, but we never feel that we are peering at his chosen subjects from a distance. A director driven by genuine curiosity and empathy, he immerses us in the world of his characters and allows us to experience events from their point of view. The breakout success of *Tangerine* has afforded him a bigger budget for *The Florida Project* and the participation of established stars (Willem Dafoe is wonderful as motel manager Bobby), but he hasn't abandoned the spirit of his micro-budget past. He still populates his films with first-time actors and embraces the unexpected occurrences that come from working in a live environment, an approach that gives his films a distinctive, unpredictable energy. In fact, we conducted our interview in a similar spirit, inviting Baker's partner Samantha Quan, the film's acting coach and associate producer, to join us when she entered the room halfway through our conversation, and to share her thoughts on working with this inexperienced cast.

Philip Concannon: How soon after *Tangerine* did you start thinking about *The Florida Project* as your next film?

Sean Baker: We knew this was probably going to be the next one, because we had already started developing it before *Tangerine*. I think it was right around *Starlet* [2012] finishing up, and maybe even on the festival run, that my co-writer Chris [Bergoch] brought this to my attention, so it was something we had been thinking about for a while.

After *Tangerine*, we had June Pictures come forward and say, "We will finance your next film for a couple of million bucks and give you final cut," so we said, "OK, cool. Here's *The Florida Project*." I think we had gotten a grant from Cinereach around that time to start taking trips there, so the treatments that we had up to *Tangerine* were very preliminary and just coming from our heads. We hadn't started any sort of research process yet and it reads that way: you can tell we didn't know the world yet. Cinereach allowed us to start taking trips there right after *Tangerine* came out in theatres, and over the next year and a half it was about doing that, and knowing that the summer of 2016 was going to be our shooting date.

PC: You made *Tangerine* in part out of frustration at the difficulty of raising funds for your films, so there's a nice irony in the fact that the film ultimately reopened those doors for you.

SB: Yes, at the time we were kicking ourselves and kind of upset at the fact that we couldn't get financing. We thought, "How many more times do we have to prove ourselves here?" But in hindsight, we wouldn't have had Brooklynn. She would have been one year old and I can't even imagine this film without Brooklynn – this is her movie. And on top of that, the fact that it's still happening, this issue hasn't been eradicated in any shape or form, and when we were taking our trips there in 2014 and 2015 we saw that it was still a very timely issue. We were meeting kids Brooklynn's age who had grown up their entire lives in motels, so we knew it was obviously very important to shine a light upon it.

PC: This is an important aspect of the movie. It's being celebrated as a very entertaining and moving film – and it is both those things – but there's also a serious social issue you want to expose here.

SB: It's very similar to *Tangerine* in a way, and that's another reason why I'm happy it happened afterwards, because with *Tangerine* – more than *Starlet* and *Prince of Broadway* – we went for full-blown comedy. There are moments of drama and pathos, but those are just moments. In the end I think audiences left *Tangerine* with a real connection to those two characters, to the point where there was a real empathy and they really cared for them. I've received messages on social media for two years now saying, "I live in Kansas and I never thought I would be able to identify with two trans women of colour who are sex workers, but I loved them so much." It proved to Chris and I that by going the comedy route, and allowing people to laugh and take the adventure

HEARTBREAK MOTEL
Sean Baker (opposite) cast non-professionals, such as Vinaite and Prince (below left), alongside established actors, such as Willem Dafoe (below right), who plays the motel manager Bobby

PHOTOGRAPHY BY EMILY BERL/NYT/REDUX/EYEVINE

with them, it got them closer and allowed it to reach a greater audience. We sort of repeated that with this film, and we decided to really focus on the kids and make it a Little Rascals adventure to a certain degree.

PC: Shooting *Tangerine* on iPhones gave you an incredible freedom and flexibility. Was it possible to maintain that with a bigger crew and shooting on film?

SB: It definitely slowed us down and it definitely made us have more of a footprint. We were dealing with the big dolly that would have to be wheeled into an elevator, etc. It was a bigger presence but the kids needed some structure, and the way that the film was made had a more controlled feel anyway. A lot of people are saying it feels like a documentary, but we have locked-down shots that are sometimes very symmetrically framed and obviously very calculated in their framing, so I don't know why people are saying that.

PC: So what kind of conversations did you have with your cinematographer Alexis Zabé about what the film should look like?

SB: With Alexis I was looking at his work on [Carlos Reygadas's] *Silent Light* (2007) and *Post Tenebras Lux* (2012), and then at his videos for Die Antwoord and Pharrell, and I was saying we were going to find something right in the middle. We were looking for the audience to have the senses of a child, with slightly heightened colours and always shooting from a kid's eyeline or below, making them big and powerful, the kings of their domain. I don't think there's one shot in the entire film when we're looking down on the kids, and that was very important to us.

And then – I don't make films like these guys but I'm very influenced by them – we looked at Ulrich Seidl, Jerry Schatzberg, Uli Edel. I'm showing those films to Alexis, like *Import/Export* [2007], which is so cold, and I'm saying, "Don't you just love every frame?" And he's saying, "I love every frame too, man, but this is not the movie!" I think Bruno Dumont's *P'tit Quinquin* [2014] was closer to how we wanted to capture the kids, with more extended takes. I didn't want the hyperactivity of *Tangerine* and I certainly didn't want to use any music, we were very clear about that. It was all going to be ambience and cicadas, and we wanted to pump up ambience the way Bruno Dumont pumps up ambience.

PC: Actually, the scene where the two girls are walking in the rain and see the cows did make me think of *Post Tenebras Lux*, and I didn't realise until afterwards that it was the same cinematographer.

SB: Right, and also in *Silent Light* there's that beautiful scene under the tree. I mean, that place exists – literally ten feet behind those motels are cow pastures, and I knew Alexis has that eye. That was perfect for the scene where they were supposed to look up and see a rainbow, and in the script they chase the rainbow and it vanishes by the time they get too close. It was going to be a CGI rainbow and we had already reached out to our effects company, getting quotes, and two weeks prior to shooting it we were at The Magic Castle when somebody shouted, "There's a rainbow over the motel!" and we realised we could save the production $40,000 if we moved our asses. But again, a big 35mm camera and a huge dolly, and it had to go all the way down the elevator and across the parking lot while everyone was shouting, "It's fading. It's fading!" We got set up just in time and just told the kids to talk about the leprechaun.

[Samantha Quan enters the room.]

PC: Having chosen these non-professional actors because they have a particularly striking look or personality, what's the next stage of your casting process? How can you be sure they're capable of carrying the film and handling the more complex scenes?

SB: We had them in scenarios and we'd group kids together. Sometimes we would say, "We're the younger kids and we're in the pool, and you three have to bully us out of the pool." They're coming over and they're like, "You're not even cool. If you were cool you'd be able to stay up past 9pm," and stuff like that. They were all extroverts to a certain degree and it was just about seeing which ones were free enough. It was about being in the moment.

PC: And what's the dynamic like when you have a seasoned actor like Willem Dafoe surrounded by people who have never been on a set before? Do you have to work with them in different ways or can you direct them as an ensemble?

Samantha Quan: He would work with Willem in a certain way and then I would talk to Bria and the kids in a certain way.

SB: I would never be directing Bria with Willem at the same time. I didn't actually have to say a lot to Willem. I would give feedback often, but by the time of the rehearsal it was clear he already understood the character, and I would just tell him where to take it from there. It was a lot of shorthand with him.

PC: That reminds me of the remarkable tracking shot following Bria's argument with Willem. Was that a challenging scene to prepare for?

SQ: That was Bria's first big scene. I worked with her for a few weeks before on her character and

I always lose my mind in post-production, every film is a traumatic thing. I live at night like a vampire, I wake up at 5pm, it's always bad

the script, breaking down every single scene and giving her an emotional through-line, because when you shoot out of order it can be discombobulating. Luckily she came down early and we had the budget and the time to do it, so she could go from beginning to end, and she knew in each scene where she was emotionally and what she wanted and didn't want. We worked like that for a few weeks, and then at the end of every day I'd work with her on the scenes for the next day so she could sleep on it, and that way she'd be prepped emotionally.

SB: That day was the proof. Chris and I were constantly writing on set and we would be changing things all the time – like we dropped Bobby's brother character and brought in a son halfway through production – so we were in a place where we were like, "If she doesn't pull off this big Steadicam shot with Willem, there's a very good chance we'll have to start taking her character away and maybe focusing on Bobby and Moonee instead." But she pulled off this four- or five-minute shot like a pro.

PC: If you're rewriting on set and constantly trying to capture spontaneous moments, does that mean that you have a huge amount of footage to sort through in the edit?

SB: Not really, especially the way we were working with kids on limited hours, and shooting on film. My ratio didn't change much from *Tangerine*, I don't think. We didn't have time to do multiple set-ups so I couldn't just allow improv to go on forever and find it in the editing, because I didn't have enough coverage. It would have meant jump-cutting and I didn't want to do that.

PC: You edit your films by yourself. How do you approach this phase of production?

SB: I have to take some distance. With *Tangerine*, [executive producers] Mark and Jay Duplass were incredible about allowing me... how long? Almost five months, right?

SQ: You finished shooting in January and started editing in April.

PC: And what are you doing in that interim period?

SB: Anything! Watching movies, hiking in the desert, getting back into shape. Just removing as much as possible. This one was different because Samantha had a play in New York so we started editing out of our apartment in New York, and I just couldn't get back into it. June Pictures were nice enough about allowing me to go very slowly again.

SQ: We had finished shooting in August. We were in New York in September and they wanted to see a rough cut or something by Thanksgiving, which is at the end of November, but I remember coming back one night to find him lying on the couch saying, "I just can't look at it yet. It doesn't feel right."

SB: I want to get enough distance so when I come back to it I'm not precious with anything, and it's like I'm coming to it as an editor with a clean slate. We knew we could never do pick-ups because those kids were growing so fast, and even 30 days after production we were seeing pictures and thinking, "Well, that's out of the window." I mean, I *always* lose my mind in post-production, every film is a traumatic thing. I live at night like a vampire, I wake up at 5pm, it's always bad.

What happened was, I finally showed June Pictures something in February, knowing Cannes was our deadline, and we got positive feedback from [June Pictures CEO] Alex Saks, and then we could finally speed up. I actually moved a lot of scenes around – there was no continuity issue because the kids were just wearing a few basic outfits all summer – but the beginning and end was always exactly the same.

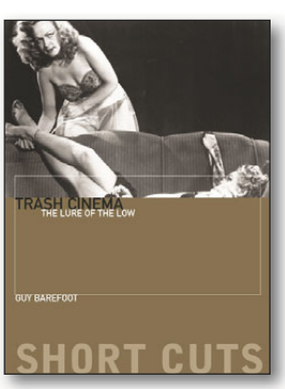
PC: On the subject of the beginning and end, how did Kool and the Gang's 'Celebration' become the official theme song of this movie?

SB: That was there from the very beginning, it was in the original script. It's just because it is the ultimate celebratory song. There's also a little town called Celebration right next to Kissimmee, it's actually an affluent area, and every day at Disney is a celebration with fireworks and marching bands, so it felt like the most appropriate song to set up the audience for getting into a celebratory mood with these kids. And with the ending, at first we thought it was just going to be the sounds of children laughing and playing, the sounds of the park, but Chris said, "Why don't we take 'Celebration' and orchestrate it?" and thank God he said that. I knew it had been used a lot in film and television, but we really tried to own it. This is now the song of *The Florida Project*.

***The Florida Project* is released in UK cinemas on 10 November and is reviewed on page 65**

EDGE OF THE CITY
Like Sean Baker's *Tangerine* (2015), starring Kitana Kiki Rodriguez as Sin-Dee and Mickey O'Hagan as Dinah (above left), *The Florida Project* (above right) shines a light on the issue of social exclusion in the US

New from Wallflower Press

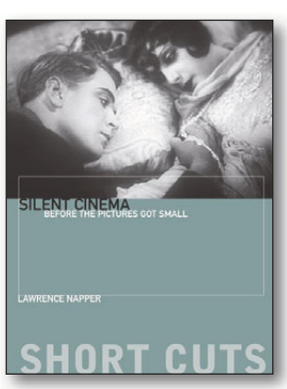


Trash Cinema

The Lure of the Low

GUY BAREFOOT

This volume explores the lower reaches of cinema and its paradoxical appeal. It looks at films from the B-movies of the 1930s to the mockbusters of today, and from the New York underground to the genre variations of Turkey's Yesilçam studios (and their YouTube afterlife).

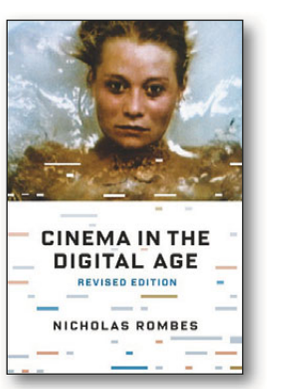


Silent Cinema

Before the Pictures Got Small

LAWRENCE NAPPER

This book offers an introduction to screen dramas of the 1920s, outlining the development of the form between the end of the First World War and the introduction of synchronized sound at the end of the 1920s. Case studies seek to move beyond the familiar silent canon, and include *The Oyster Princess* (1919), *It* (1927), *Shooting Stars* (1927), and *The Girl with the Hatbox* (1927).



Cinema in the Digital Age

Revised Edition

NICHOLAS ROMBES

"In this revised edition of his groundbreaking *Cinema in the Digital Age*, [Rombes] thrillingly identifies the essential films, technologies and practices emblematizing the rupture of digital before peering, with both anxiety and excitement, into the pixel-smeared wilderness ahead."

—Scott Macaulay, editor-in-chief, *Filmmaker Magazine*; producer, Forensic Films

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DELTA BLUES

Dee Rees's 'Mudbound' tells the tale of two families – one black, one white – in Mississippi in the aftermath of World War II, exploring how shared experiences and tentative friendships count for nothing against a toxic social system determined to keep communities divided

By Kelli Weston

If from dust you came, it is to mud you shall return in the latest feature from writer-director Dee Rees, of *Pariah* (2011) and *Bessie* (2015) fame. *Mudbound*, based on Hillary Jordan's prize-winning debut novel, opens in the Arcadian fields of post-World War II Mississippi, where the two McAllan brothers, Henry (Jason Clarke) and Jamie (Garrett Hedlund), are digging a grave for their father Pappy (Jonathan Banks). Before they can finish, a torrential rain descends upon them, so relentless that Jamie nearly drowns in the muddy hole. With that, the film plunges back into the past to unravel the tangled fate of two families, bound – if not helplessly possessed – by the dirt.

While Jamie fights in the war abroad, Henry moves his wife Laura (Carey Mulligan), their children and Pappy from the city to a country farm. The arrival of this white family immediately upends the relatively quiet lives of a family of black tenant farmers, the Jacksons – Hap (Rob Morgan), his wife Florence (a poised performance from singer Mary J. Blige) and their children. Their eldest son Ronsel (Jason Mitchell) has also just enlisted in the war. Florence and Laura forge a tentative bond through motherhood, but the entitled Henry frequently requires Hap's subservience, despite their shared love of the land.

This obsession with possessing the earth (a passion that neither Laura nor Florence share with their husbands) struck Rees as a natural starting-point from

which to make the tale her own. The novel devotes first-person chapters to most of its main characters, apart from the bitterly racist Pappy, and the film largely preserves each perspective through voiceover. In Hap's narration, Rees added a rumination on the dual meaning of 'deeds'.

"I love the play on words, like what good is a 'deed' and the idea of enfranchisement," says Rees. "Even though [Hap's] blood is in the soil, his sweat is in the soil and the blood of his ancestors is in the soil, a piece of paper, a *deed*, has more meaning than their *deeds*."

Rees also sought to develop the novel's subjective tone visually. "When we're with Hap, we see the world as Hap sees it. We see the field as this endless stretch of thing to be conquered. With Henry, we see beauty; we understand that this is aspirational."

Together with cinematographer Rachel Morrison – who worked on *Dope* (2015) and the upcoming *Black Panther* – the director presents a striking, convincing portrait of pastoral Mississippi, its landscape rendered in all its vastness, bathed in muted natural light. She and Morrison drew inspiration from a number of sources, from documentaries by Les Blank to the series 'The Americans' by photographer Robert Frank. The artist Whitfield Lovell's etchings on wood, based on vintage photos of African Americans during the Civil War era, also provided direction for Rees and Morrison's vision.

"We wanted it to feel like that old style," says Rees. "I'm also very hands-on with things like the smaller casting. So for the character of Rose Tricklebank, I wanted a woman who looks like a woman who runs a general store. In period pieces people remember the hair, they remember the costumes, but they forget about the faces. And I wanted faces that felt like they only got 500 calories a day and didn't use moisturiser. I told background casting that these people should look like they've never seen a goji berry in their life."

Throughout the casting process the director explains that she was drawn to angular, "timeless" faces like that of newcomer Jason Mitchell, fresh from the acclaim of his breakout role as rapper Eazy-E in *Straight Outta Compton* (2015). Hedlund, whom Rees had seen in the Coen brothers' *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013), had a "tortured quality" that Rees felt integral to the winsome, disillusioned Jamie.

The two young men return to the South decorated heroes, noticeably haunted by their experiences in the war. Ronsel, in particular, has great difficulty readjusting to the crushing order of Jim Crow-era Mississippi. He longs for the relative freedom of Europe, where he has left behind a German sweetheart and, he subsequently discovers, a mixed-race child. Without the language to articulate their trauma, they each try to acclimatise to their new situation, with little success. The land holds no promise for the restless Ronsel, much to his father's chagrin; meanwhile, Jamie finds a miserable solace in alcohol, which drives a wedge between him and his brother, but does nothing to quell the attraction between him and Laura. Ronsel and Jamie eventually realise that their best chance of finding a way to cope within their small, stifling community lies with each other. For the first time they are able to talk about the war with someone who was there – someone who is able to grasp both the thrill and horror of it.

"I felt it was really interesting that in some ways they're like the spine, thematically, these two men who escaped the bubble," says Rees. Her earlier films *Pariah* and *Bessie* focused on queer black women in romantic,

FIELD OF DREAMS
Ronsel and Jamie (opposite), played by Jason Mitchell and Garrett Hedlund, are World War II veterans who strike up an unlikely friendship in rural Mississippi; Rob Morgan as Ronsel's father Hap (top); and Carey Mulligan as neighbour Laura (above)

frequently complicated relationships, but for all the new film's differences, Rees believes *Mudbound* explores similar themes, namely the transgressive nature of Jamie and Ronsel's alliance, out of place in their society.

"Here, still, we have this relationship that's transgressive. I was very cautious – this is one of those things where it could've gone really saccharine and really Hollywood really easily," explains Rees. "So I wanted it to be a slow, low trajectory. My feeling was these guys are not going to be best friends, but there's going to be some simpatico, and they're kind of this port in a storm in a way." Indeed, the friendship that blooms begins tentatively, awkwardly, and the underlying tension never fully dissipates, right up until the climactic moment when Jamie is forced to make a chilling decision.

Jamie and Ronsel's illicit friendship becomes the film's emotional compass, but first and foremost *Mudbound* is an ensemble piece, and the entire cast delivers impressive performances, notably R&B luminary Blige, the least experienced of the principal cast.

"I wasn't worried because I knew Mary. I wanted her because she has such empathy, and such a life behind her eyes," says Rees. "She observes everything and sees everything, and doesn't say everything on her mind. But there's such a genuineness. If you listen to her lyrics, there's a profundity there. The person who writes these lyrics, the person who sings about her life, the way

LAND AND FREEDOM
Jason Clarke's Henry pleads with Hap (Rob Morgan) and his wife Florence (Mary J. Blige) to help him bury his father in *Mudbound*, by director Dee Rees (below)

she opens herself in her lyrics and opens herself in her music – her performance is like a therapy session with 30,000 people. I knew someone that was capable of that would be capable of really being Florence."

The Blige who audiences are familiar with completely disappears behind Florence's dark round shades and a countenance that gives up nothing easily. "I'd found this photo," says Rees. "Everybody was like, 'How does she have sunglasses?' And I was like, 'Oh no, this is a reference photo, like sharecropper sunglasses.' So I saved it to show to her because for Florence it's not a vanity, it's an investment in your work. Your work is in the sun, so you're going to put these 25 cents into getting this thing for your work. And it was great character styling because it makes her unknowable at times, but we know she's there."

Blige's performance provides an anchor for Morgan's idealistic Hap, whose faith in the land is only outmatched by his faith in the church, and who is ultimately bemused by the son who returns to him.

"I thought it was important to show Hap's mindset that he has a vision for his life," says Rees. "In the book it was already set up that they were shared tenants not sharecroppers. And I thought that was an important distinction to keep: that they didn't start out in debt, they paid their rent."

Unfortunately, before Ronsel returns, an unexpected fall injures Hap and sets the Jacksons behind on payments for the farm. Henry, unsympathetically, forces Hap to purchase a mule, plunging the Jacksons into debt.

"That's another thing I switched. In the book, [Hap] is working on the mule shed, and for me I wanted it to be Hap working on his church because then the church could represent this unfinished faith, this naked belief – literally, it's naked; in the church you see the sky," says Rees, of the roofless structure – little more than scaffolding – in which Hap preaches to a modest, if enthusiastic, congregation. "I wanted him to start questioning his beliefs, like, 'Why, God, could you let me fall when I'm using the one thing I have, which is my labour of all things? I fall down using my labour and which then plunged me into debt.' Which is kind of how nature can seem to work against you – but nature is indifferent to us."

When Rees read the original draft of the script by Virgil Williams (who had previously written for television series such as *24*, *ER* and *Criminal Minds*), she was especially interested in these dynamics between the two families and the nature that they both cultivate and that in turn works against them. Laura – who adapts dutifully but unhappily to life outside the city – observes that violence is "part and parcel of country life".

"Sometimes I'll have images that I want to shoot that are disconnected [from the plot]," says Rees. "When I was pitching the producer and talking about stuff I wanted to do that's not there yet, I was like, 'I want a kid eating dirt. I want her killing a chicken.' It's probably my favourite part from Hillary's book, that whole meditation on nature. I had these images that I wanted to use to encapsulate that. The dead mouse and the dead possum with ants running out of it, that's not stuff that was in the book, but these are ways I can underscore this passage that I love and really show the routineness of death in this world. In a way it's a kind of tonal foreshadowing; we know that this is where death is routine and unremarked upon so what does this mean for our families?"

The Nashville-born director also recycled the stories of her parents and grandparents' agrarian upbringings. "My grandmother swore, 'I'm not picking cotton. I'm not chopping cotton. I'm not being a domestic worker. I'm going to be a stenographer,'" says Rees. "That's why I said, 'Well, Lilly May [Ronsel's younger sister] is going to be a stenographer.' She kind of became a cipher for my grandmother who, given what's in front of you, says, 'I choose none of this. Given the choice of option A and option B, I'm going to choose option C, which I can't even see yet.'"

Yet even though these themes of systemic inequality and oppression are explored through the experiences of previous generations, the past few months have proved the issues to be as relevant as ever. "What the film shows us is that it's us," says Rees. "I think people dismiss the actions of their grandfathers, uncles, where that was 'the times'. That was 'the times' then. No, that was them. We are the times. We create the attitudes; we create what's acceptable and not acceptable. This is not some anonymous unknown force; it's us. It's people who should be accountable."

My grandmother swore, 'I'm not picking cotton. I'm not being a domestic worker. I'm going to be a stenographer.' So I said, 'Well, in the film Lilly May is going to be a stenographer'

***Mudbound* will be available on Netflix in the UK from 17 November**

DEE REES PORTRAIT BY PATRICK MILLER/REDUX/EYEVINE

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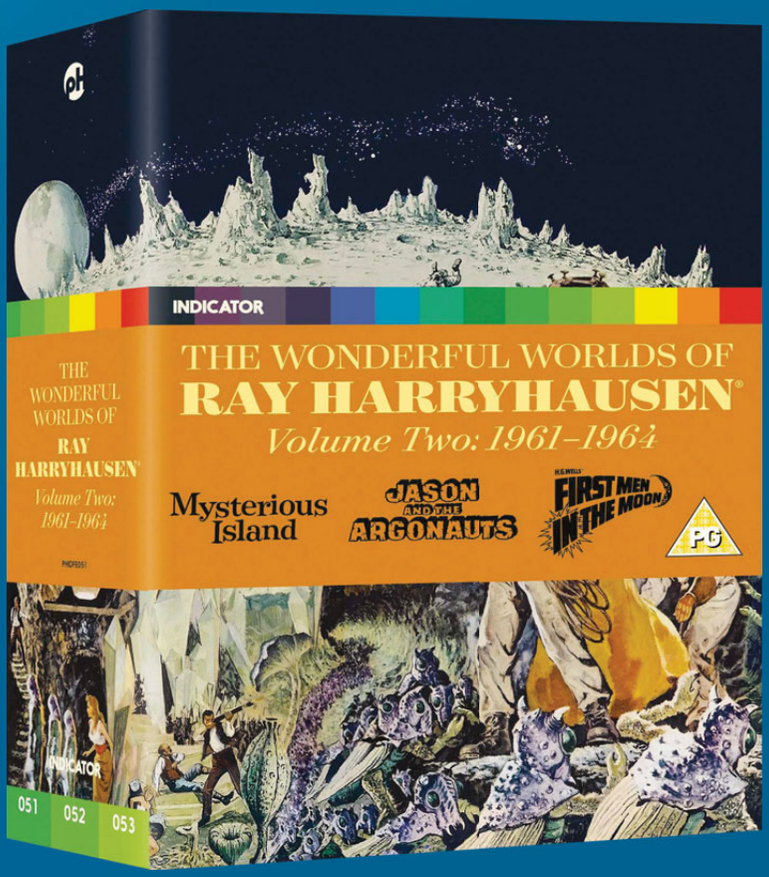

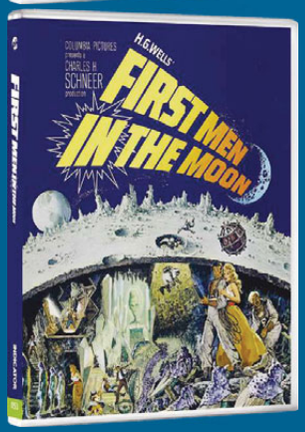

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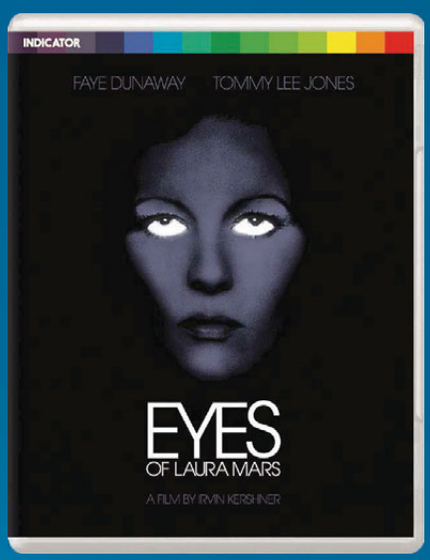

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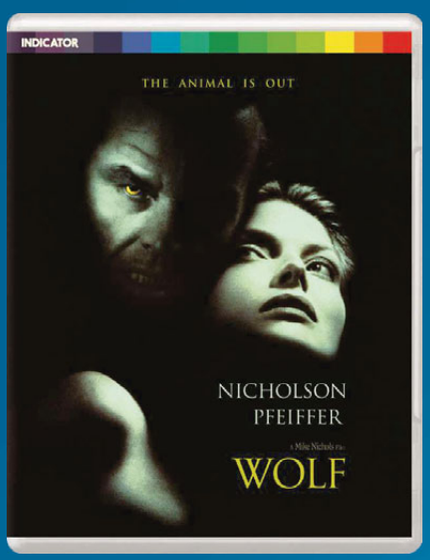

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ROAD TO PERDITION

Forty years after the release of the masterful 'Sorcerer', William Friedkin's blistering remake of 'The Wages of Fear', about a group of men driving a cargo of explosives across perilous terrain, the director reminisces about how a brutal shoot gave way to an equally brutal critical reception

By Mark Kermode

After the global successes of *The French Connection* (1971) and *The Exorcist* (1973), director William Friedkin mounted the riskiest film of his career – an adaptation of Henri-Georges Clouzot's 1953 classic *The Wages of Fear*. Based on a novel by Georges Arnaud (aka Henri Girard), Clouzot's film followed four disparate Europeans, variously stranded in South America, who agree to drive two truckloads of volatile nitroglycerin over treacherous terrain for financial reward. A critical hit which inspired such lesser American knock-offs as Howard Koch's 1958 *Violent Road*, *The Wages of Fear* seemed ripe for contemporary reinvention in the strife-riven mid-70s.

With *The Wild Bunch* screenwriter Walon 'Wally' Green, Friedkin recast the key characters as a Mexican hitman (Francisco Rabal), an Arab terrorist (Amidou), a French businessman (Bruno Cremer) and an American gangster (Roy Scheider). Requiring two studios – Universal and Paramount – to cover its expanding budget, *Sorcerer* (1977) was a gruelling masterpiece. Yet the results proved fatally out of step with audiences flocking to see *Star Wars*. A critical and commercial failure when it opened 40 years ago, the film has since been reassessed, and is now considered an overlooked gem; the author Stephen King recently called it his favourite film of all time. Unveiled in a new 4K transfer at the Venice Film Festival in 2013, *Sorcerer* has been rediscovered in cinemas and on Blu-ray by a new generation of fans astonished by its grinding, visceral power.

Mark Kermode: After *The Exorcist*, you could have done anything. Why did you opt for a remake of *The Wages of Fear*?

William Friedkin: Wally Green and I used to work together at Wolper doing documentaries for the ABC network. We were talking about the world situation; that if there was no way for world leaders to get together, we were probably going to be the generation that blows up. And we started talking about *The Wages of Fear*.

MK: The Clouzot film or the source novel?

WF: Oh, the film. There was no English translation of the novel. But we both remembered and loved the film from 1953. It had not been widely seen in America. It had played in arthouses, with subtitles. We thought it was a great film that perfectly captured this notion of the separate countries of the world either co-operating or dying together. So we took that premise and ran with it. Then Wally, who spoke five or six languages fluently, got the novel. It wasn't great – it was good pulp, which often makes the best movies. We decided to create our own characters, different from the ones in Arnaud's book and Clouzot's film.

Then I went to France to do some press for *The Exorcist*, and I met up with Clouzot. I told him I was interested in taking the premise of *The Wages of Fear*. He didn't seem very happy about it – understandably so – but he wasn't against it. But it turned out he didn't have the rights to it anyway – they were with Arnaud, who *hated* Clouzot's film. He was crazy – a very ornery old guy. He

A BRIDGE TOO FAR
(From left) Ramon Bieri, Bruno Cremer, Roy Scheider, Amidou and Peter Capell in *Sorcerer*, which was forced to switch locations from the Dominican Republic to Mexico to capture the film's tense set-piece bridge crossing (right) after the first river started to dry up

hated my film too! Anyway, we bought the rights from him for very little money, and we set out to make it in our own way.

MK: You originally had Steve McQueen in mind for the lead. What happened?

WF: I talked to Steve about the film, and sent him Wally's script. Two days later he called and said, "This is the best script I've ever read." Then he said, "I've got a favour to ask. I just married Ali MacGraw and you're gonna be off in some jungle for six months. Would you consider writing a role for her?" I said, "Steve, you just told me it's the best script you've ever read. There are no women in it. There's a very small part for a French woman, but it's not a part for Ali." So he said, "All right, make her an executive producer, or an associate producer." Back then, I was really an arrogant punk. If Steve McQueen had asked me that today, I would have immediately agreed. But I said, "Steve, that's a bullshit credit. Don't you have more respect for your wife than to give her some bullshit credit? I'm not gonna do that." And he said, "All right, then find locations where you can shoot it in the US." I just said, "Steve, I'm very happy with the locations I have." I was just an arrogant moron. So he said that under those conditions he couldn't do the film. Now, with McQueen I had commitments from Marcello Mastroianni and Lino Ventura. But when I got Roy Scheider instead of McQueen, neither Mastroianni nor Ventura would take second billing.

MK: Do you think having Scheider rather than McQueen was one of the reasons the film failed to find an audience?

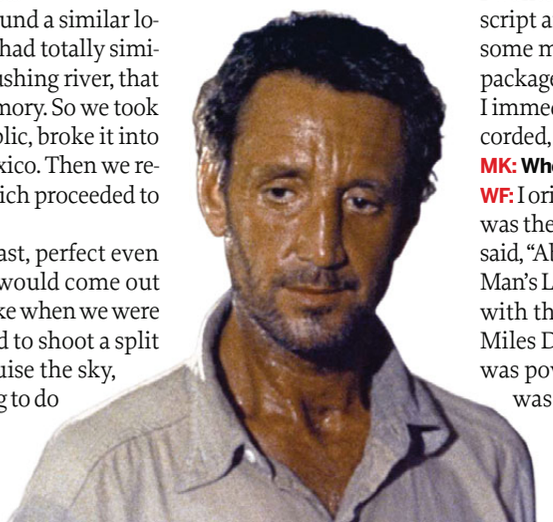
WF: Scheider was great, but he was not a huge star like McQueen. He certainly scored in *The French Connection*, and he had done *Jaws* (1975), but he wasn't in a place where he could just take the audience with him. I think he's brilliant in the film. But he was not a movie star. And in those days you needed a movie star.

MK: The shoot of *Sorcerer* was famously gruelling. What was the most difficult thing about it?

WF: Almost everything that physically could go wrong did go wrong. We built this bridge, which was hydraulically operated, that looked like a rickety old wooden bridge. We built it in the Dominican Republic over a rushing river that was about six feet high, and which had never gone down during the months that we were going to shoot. So we built the bridge over this river, at a cost of a million dollars, because it was going to be the big set piece of the film. And gradually the river went down and down and down, until there was less than a foot of water flowing through it. Impossible. We had weather experts and all kinds of meteorologists telling us, "This is impossible! This can't happen!" But it happened.

So [production designer] John Box found a similar location near Tuxtepec, in Mexico. They had totally similar topography, about the same-sized rushing river, that again had not diminished in living memory. So we took the bridge out of the Dominican Republic, broke it into pieces, and shipped it all the way to Mexico. Then we rebuilt it over this vast rushing river... which proceeded to go down and down and down.

In the mornings you had this overcast, perfect even light, but then at about noon the sun would come out and burn everything off. Every day. So like when we were shooting in Iraq for *The Exorcist*, we had to shoot a split schedule. Sometimes, in order to disguise the sky, we had to make it rain. I wasn't planning to do the bridge scene in the rain – I thought the bridge swinging over a fast-moving river was enough. But now we're getting tips of sunlight everywhere, so we had to bring in these rain-making machines. Then people began to get sick. People got gangrene. I got malaria.



A BUMP IN THE ROAD
Director William Friedkin (opposite) originally had Steve McQueen in mind for the role of Jackie Scanlon, a criminal on the run from the Mafia, but the actor's recent marriage to Ali MacGraw made him reluctant to shoot away from home for long periods, and Roy Scheider (below) took the part

We had these Mexican labourers who built the bridge, 20 or 30 of them. I was very friendly with them. There was one guy in particular I liked very much. And one day he whipped out a *Federales* badge. He was an undercover cop. He said, "Señor Bill, you have people on your crew who are doing drugs. You're a very nice man and I like you, otherwise I would arrest all of these people. But I like you, so I'm not going to arrest them, but they have to leave this country tomorrow." This included stunt men, key grips, make-up artists, special effects guys. So I lost about 20 members of the crew. Those were just a couple of the problems I can remember.

MK: How long did you end up shooting for?

WF: Oh God, I think it was like ten months, maybe more.

MK: And when you were shooting it, did you think, 'This is tough, but the results are really good'?

WF: I thought it was all great! But when we were in the jungle we couldn't see the footage, there was no way to get the dailies. Dick Bush, the great British cinematographer who did *Mahler* [1974] and *Tommy* [1975] for Ken Russell, had shot all this wonderful footage in Paris; Jerusalem; Elizabeth, New Jersey; and a little in Vera Cruz. But when he got to the jungle, Dick was lost because the light in the jungle constantly changes. And Dick just couldn't manage it. He couldn't find places to put lights and he wasn't skilled at using reflectors. In the end I brought in John Stephens, who was a commercials camera operator, and who was wonderful at building rigs for the camera. He and I had worked together on documentaries at Wolper along with Wally, and he did all the jungle stuff.

MK: Tell me about Tangerine Dream's music.

WF: I met them in Germany when I was on tour for *The Exorcist*. The local Warner Brothers guy took me to an abandoned church in the Black Forest at midnight. There were no lights except the lights from their electronic instruments. You couldn't see the musicians. They started to play what sounded like the music of the spheres, and I thought it was extraordinary. Synths were a very new thing then – they were popularised later by Giorgio Moroder, who scored *Midnight Express* [1978] for Alan Parker.

Anyway, I met with [band leader and founder] Edgar Froese and I told him that this stuff was great, and although I didn't know what my next film was going to be, I wanted them to do the music. Later I sent him Wally's script and we spoke on the phone. I asked him to write some music based on our conversation. Months later, a package of audio tapes arrives in Tuxtepec. It was terrific. I immediately saw how to cherry-pick what they had recorded, and use it in the film.

MK: Where did the title *Sorcerer* come from?

WF: I originally wanted to call the film 'Ballbreaker' – that was the first title. And [Universal boss] Lew Wasserman said, "Absolutely no way." Then I thought of calling it 'No Man's Land', but as you know Harold Pinter wrote a play with that same title. So I was listening to an album by Miles Davis called *Sorcerer* and I just thought the word was powerful. It later occurred to me that the sorcerer was an evil wizard, and in this case the evil wizard

was fate. *The Exorcist* was about faith, and this was about fate – in the lives of four different guys who really screwed up.

MK: 'Sorcerer' is also a name painted on one of the trucks.

WF: Yeah, we named the trucks Sorcerer and Lazaro. When I went to Ecuador, I saw these trucks painted that way, and the drivers all gave their trucks names. So a truck would be called Lucia, after the guy's girlfriend, or some would have more cosmic names.

MK: What about the face that you briefly see carved on the rock as the trucks go past? It's demonic, like the face of Pazuzu in *The Exorcist*.

WF: John Box had the idea of putting that on a rock as a kind of warning or harbinger of what is to come – the mystery of fate in some guise. Our art director Roy Walker carved that. He went on to be Kubrick's production designer on *The Shining* [1980].

MK: After all this effort, at what point did you realise that *Sorcerer* was in trouble?

WF: I lived in Bel Air, and I would walk every morning down this long driveway and read the papers. There was a great film critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, Charles Champlin, who had always given my films rave reviews. So I went and got the paper the day after *Sorcerer* opened in two theatres in LA, and two in NY. So I'm walking back up the hill, and I open the page to his review, and it begins: "What went wrong?" And the rest was devastating. That's when I knew. And then the audiences dwindled, and *Star Wars* opened and took the whole audience – that was the only film that you had to see that year.

MK: Did it hurt?

WF: Well, I was extremely disappointed, because I honestly thought this was the best film I had ever made, and I still feel that way. So I felt bad that I didn't get it over to the audience. I didn't feel like something horrible had been done to me. I just thought I had failed. I absolutely felt that whatever I did that I thought was so brilliant just didn't work. I thought I had let the audience down, and I just couldn't figure out what I had done wrong.

MK: When did the film's change of fortunes begin?

WF: There was a guy at Warner Video called Jeff Baker, and one day he said to me, "Whatever happened to that picture you made – *Sorcerer*?" I said I didn't even know who owned it any more. So I got my lawyer to get into it, and they found out that the rights were no longer split – Universal's rights had expired, and Paramount controlled it. So Paramount made a deal with Warner Brothers to release it. When the DVD came out, it was a huge hit – same with the Blu-ray. So then they started to think that maybe there was life in it. And then we made a DCP [digital cinema package], and it started getting some theatrical plays.

MK: Do you think there's anything about the times we're in now that makes *Sorcerer* more relevant than it was in 1977?

WF: Well, the world situation is much worse today that it was then. But I'm not sure people want to be reminded of that. I don't want people to look for the metaphor, even though that was something that motivated me. Only the story matters. I thought it was a damn good action adventure that was 'acoustic'; it's not made with digital effects. Everything you see in the film, we had to do! As in *The Exorcist*. I just think it's a wonderful story.

I thought it was a damn good action adventure that was 'acoustic'; it's not made with digital effects. Everything you see in the film, we had to do!

i ***Sorcerer* is out now in selected UK cinemas and has just been released on DVD and Blu-ray by Entertainment One. *The Wages of Fear* is out now on DVD and Blu-ray from the BFI**

PORTRAIT BY LAURA LEZZA/GETTY IMAGES (1)

LOVE & FRIENDSHIP
Jamie Bell as Peter Turner and Annette Bening as Gloria Grahame in Paul McGuigan's *Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool*

CATCH A FALLING STAR

Paul McGuigan's bittersweet love story 'Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool' is a warm-hearted portrait of the affair between a young Scouse actor and the one-time queen of noir Gloria Grahame. Here Annette Bening, who plays her in the film, discusses her decades-long preparation for the role

By Will Lawrence

Annette Bening's connection to Gloria Grahame stretches back almost 30 years. Bening was preparing for the role of con artist Myra Langtry in one of her very first films, 1990's *The Grifters*. Her director, Stephen Frears, suggested she look at Grahame's films. After all, *The Grifters* was a neo-*noir* "and so it made sense to look at *film noir*, the women of that period, and the way that women were portrayed", says Bening. "Gloria, of course, holds a special place in that period."

Grahame made her name in *film noir*. After roles in *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) and *Merton of the Movies* (1947), she scooped an Oscar nomination for playing a 'tart with a heart' in *Crossfire* (1947). Following her second marriage, to director Nicholas Ray, she landed her first leading role, in his *In a Lonely Place* (1950). She went on to win an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress in Vincente Minnelli's *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1953) and dazzled in the likes of *Sudden Fear* (1952) and Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat* (1953).

Some suggest Grahame herself was like a character from the genre in which she excelled – "unfathomable and ungraspable", in the words of critic Judith Williamson, she lived a life littered with tortured moments and scattered with the debris of failed relationships. Her third marriage, to producer Cy Howard, lasted less than three years, and by the time she married her former stepson, Anthony Ray, her film career had waned. By the 1980s she was working in small-scale theatre productions in England.

It was during this period, while in her 50s, that she met Peter Turner, an actor in his 20s bidding to make his way in London. They struck up a relationship, passionate and intense, though short-lived. And yet, when she collapsed on stage in Lancaster in 1981 it was Turner to whom she appealed, spending her last days in the UK with his family in Liverpool before her return to the US. She died soon after.

The relationship had a profound effect on Turner, who published a memoir in 1986, *Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool*, an affectionate, moving and wry recollection of his and Grahame's unlikely story. Now, finally, it comes to the big screen, with Bening as Grahame, Jamie Bell as Turner and Paul McGuigan directing.

I feel like with any character I play, I am their advocate. We are there to defend them in a way. And of course I want to be as truthful as I can

Will Lawrence: Hadn't you and the film's producer Barbara Broccoli spoken about adapting *Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool* years ago?

Annette Bening: Yes, many, many years ago. It was a different iteration of the project. I had read it then, and it was percolating during that time and when it came up again recently it felt right, that now is the time. It was clearly in Barbara's mind that I am the right age to play Gloria now. The fact that Barbara knew Gloria and Peter when they were together and had a real friendship with them translated into the present. And the fact that we had a past and had talked about the film years ago enriches it further. This story has always stayed with me.

WL: What do you find compelling about Gloria as an actor?

AB: Like any good actor she has her own unique presence, but she was someone who got typecast. She ended up being that femme fatale because that was what was offered to her – although in *The Bad and the Beautiful* she's less so and that is what she won the Academy Award for. She had a really interesting presence on screen and she was a good listener. When you watch her listen to something interesting, you feel there's an inner life going on and that is what is compelling about her.

WL: She was capable of doing a lot more than being the femme fatale. Take *In a Lonely Place*, for example.

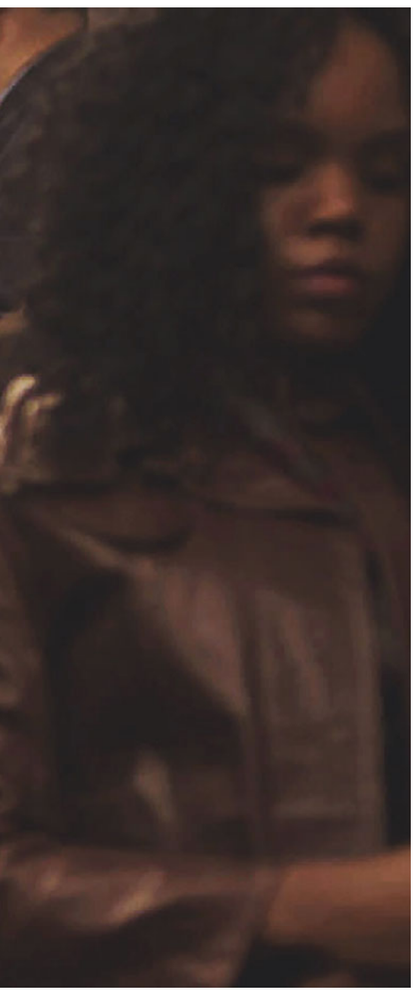
AB: Oh yes. It is a kind of *noir* picture, but she has a different character in that and she is much, much more. I just love that performance; it is one of my favourites. She is a little less of a femme fatale. She is the mysterious woman next door and there is something very subtle and very interesting about what she is doing in that movie.

WL: There is tremendous range in the Gloria you play in this film.

AB: Meeting Gloria, having this relationship and then breaking up and her re-entering his life – that ended up being incredibly meaningful to Peter Turner. And his way of dealing with it was – and this is just my take on it – that he *had* to write the book. And the book is very much an expression of Peter, who is a really unusual, very sensitive, beautiful guy. All the pain he felt, he was able to put it into this story, and from the time he met her until the end of the story, there is this incredible range in the way he saw her. So you're right, and the movie, I hope, reflects that. And though it is told out of sequence, I had it in my mind as this arc. You always have to do that in movies when you are shooting out of order. You have some sort of sketch in your mind about where you would be at a certain place in the narrative.

WL: There has always been pressure on actresses about how they should look but it was really pronounced during Gloria's time in Hollywood – and her looks really bothered her. Did your heart go out to her in that regard?

AB: Definitely. There was a lot of pressure. And one of the things you really notice when you look at the films of that period, Gloria's in particular, was how often she was beaten up on camera. Now it is talked about and handled in a very different way. I don't know if there is more or less domestic violence than there was then, but



TUNNEL OF LOVE
Peter Turner (Jamie Bell) met Gloria Grahame (Annette Bening) in the late 70s in a guesthouse in Primrose Hill, London, where she was staying while visiting England to perform in a play

in those movies it is shocking how casually men were hitting women.

All of us in the movies are dealing with our faces, looking at ourselves. Everyone else is looking at us. There is always the subject of your appearance. From what I understand, Gloria was from a very early age concerned with her appearance and was insecure about it. So my heart goes out to her in all ways because that is my job as an actress.

WL: And as she got older she found it hard to get work in Hollywood.

AB: Absolutely. And the work she did get – I watched a lot of later stuff – some of that was not very good. They were not good scripts. But she was a worker and she was very practical and I respect that. You do the best you can with what is there. She was somebody who struggled with accepting her own appearance. That was a real battle for her.

WL: When playing Gloria before her illness struck, did you imagine her carrying a deep sadness about the way her career had unfolded?

AB: It is a good question. It is a question I was asking as well but there was not an absolute answer because Gloria isn't telling the story. Peter is, and it's really his point of view. I didn't have her there. I feel like with any character I play, I am their advocate. We are there to defend them in a way. But I don't know what part of her was sad and what part of her was just getting on with it. My sense is that there was a lot of both, especially given the way her life had gone and how tumultuous it had been. I was deeply, deeply curious about this and of course I want to be as truthful as I can, but a lot of these questions I didn't have any absolute answer to. So I took it from what Peter told me and from what other people told me.

WL: Where else were you able to search for those clues?

AB: I didn't have a lot of people to talk to but I had a few – though I didn't want to invade anyone's privacy, certainly not her family's. With a lot of public figures, there is a lot of information out there – you find interviews; other people talk about them. But with Gloria there isn't a lot, so I had to take from what Peter described. I asked him a lot of questions, but I also respected his privacy. Peter is very discreet. The book is very discreet.

WL: What resonated most from your discussions with Peter?

AB: Their love for each other. Their love affair was like every really intense love affair; it had its own unique character. He is an actor so he is in the world of the arts but nonetheless he is a guy who grew up in a big family in Liverpool while she grew up in Hollywood. She was much older. She was a big movie star, though I don't know how to quantify that. She was a supporting actress. A lot of people don't know who she is.

WL: People have often heard of her films but not of Gloria herself.

AB: Yes, and I have always loved that about her. I love that it is not Marilyn Monroe or Lana Turner. Gloria wasn't on that level. She was on the next tier down and she always referred to herself as "the replacement". But there is something very unique about her and, God knows, about her personal life. Then she found this unlikely connection with Peter. I ended up feeling like he must have been the most gentle, loving, accepting person she probably had ever been with. Based on what we do know about her personal life, and her relationships before that, this one sounds very unusual for her. There was something incredibly beautiful about that. Their love for each other, despite their age difference, despite their backgrounds and all of that, was really genuine.

WL: And by the end, that love was quite profound.

AB: Oh, yes. They had broken up so the relationship had ended, but then when she got ill and reached out to Peter, it took on a different meaning and that was the part for Peter that was so overwhelming. He didn't expect her to come back into his life and suddenly she is there. Not only is she there but she is really sick. Who among us has to deal with that? I have never had that experience where someone you've had a really tempestuous, really passionate relationship with is suddenly there again and you are helping them through an incredibly difficult time. In some ways she didn't even acknowledge what she was doing. I guess she was in such denial about how ill she was. She didn't want people to know, she didn't want her kids to know, she didn't want to be a burden to anyone. He was in a really tough position.

WL: Do you think she loved Peter's family because they accepted her for who she was?

AB: Peter shared this with me. There is something in the book about her interest in his family and her connection to his family which was very unusual for her. They represented the normalcy and stability she never had. Her dad had left when she was young. She loved her dad very much but never had much of a relationship with him. She was raised by her mum primarily and her sister who was older, and then she started acting as a teenager and very quickly she was in the movies and getting involved in all these marriages. And so Peter's family, to her they were so down to earth and open and loving and accepting of her.

WL: You have a wonderful scene with Gloria's mother and sister. Did that feel something of a counterpoint to the simplicity of Peter's family life?

AB: We don't know an awful lot about Gloria's family life, really. I think she did have a good relationship with her mum and she loved her sister. They had been very close and her sister was married to Robert Mitchum's brother and they had been very much connected throughout the whole of their adult lives. I think the fact that Gloria became a very well-known actress and had a fairly scandalous personal life affected her family and her sister and her mum. But in the end there was a lot of love.

WL: You must have enjoyed having Vanessa Redgrave play Gloria's mother?

AB: When she agreed to play the part I was just beyond thrilled. The day she came in she was doing a play, *Richard III*. She came in on her one day off to shoot it and she was extraordinary. I never imagined I would have gotten the opportunity to act with her.

WL: And what did you make of Jamie Bell's turn as Peter?

AB: We got along very well and he is also such a secure person himself. We were able to be pretty open with each other about what we were going to do and worked quite a bit before we started shooting. Paul, the director, was also very open and we worked quite a bit on the process once we were all in the room together. There, the screenplay becomes a different beast and in most of the films I have done, there's always been good work done right before shooting. Jamie had a lot of good questions. I just adore him. I was so grateful. He's a great actor.

***Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool* is released in UK cinemas on 17 November and is reviewed on page 62**

THE FLICKER

Gloria Grahame's effortless ability to switch between coquettish innocence, worldly bitterness and smouldering sensuality helped create her screen legend in the golden age of noir in the 1950s – before tabloid infamy and her own insecurities started to take their toll

By Serena Bramble

If you can't quite peg Gloria Grahame down, you aren't alone: neither could studio boss Louis B. Mayer, who gave her her first Hollywood contract and then didn't know what to do with her. Of all people, it was Frank Capra who helped define the dual sides of her natural earthiness when he cast her in *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). As the town flirt Violet, Grahame is clearly having a blast playing a woman whose coquettishness drives some of the film's funniest scenes. But the unexpected time-flip that turns homely Bedford Falls into seamy Pottersville foreshadows Grahame's status as a *film noir* icon. In Capra's alternative timeline, Violet's small-town cheer gets curdled by years in a town shaped by crime and economic depression. In her brief moments, she displays all the bitterness at being failed by the American Dream that defines the *noir* mood.

Her next role, in *Crossfire* (1947), as a downtrodden prostitute, seems like a natural extension of the Pottersville Violet, given more texture and depth. The cadence of her performance – from the sensuality in her face to the anger in her voice to the search of hope in her eyes for a better tomorrow, to the way her body language indicates a deep need for a warm shoulder – is devastating. It earned her an Oscar nomination, and was her favourite role.

"I was infatuated with her, but I didn't like her very much": so began director Nicholas Ray's relationship with Grahame, which soon led to a shotgun marriage. Their affair on the set of *A Woman's Secret* in 1948 resulted in a pregnancy while Grahame was still married to her first husband. At 1.30pm Grahame's divorce was finalised; at 6.30pm she and Ray were married; by nightfall Ray was gambling away all his money, resentful at his marriage before it had even begun. The straw that broke the camel's back was, reportedly, Ray walking in on Grahame and his 13-year-old son from a previous marriage in a compromising situation. Ain't love grand?

If Ray instantly regretted attaching himself to Grahame personally, their collaboration on *In a Lonely Place* (1950) makes clear that he at least respected her artistically, insisting that she be cast opposite Humphrey Bogart when Bogart's wife Lauren Bacall couldn't get loaned out by Warner Brothers. The role of failed actress Laurel Gray is one seemingly tailor-made for Bacall's cool spikiness and intelligence, but Grahame is flawless at conveying a woman much older and wiser than her 27 years, matching Bogart's cynical barbs beat for beat, cool enough to block his advances, though interested enough to leave the door open for something more. Two people chewed up and spat out by the post-war film industry, their connection is fuelled by a genuine desperation for a human connection rarely seen in a genre known for its double crosses and deception.

But it's also a relationship born out of violence, and though *In a Lonely Place* is often celebrated as one of the best love stories in *film noir*, it's less heralded as a complex look at being trapped in an abusive relationship. The entire dynamic of the film shifts at the moment Laurel realises the man she loves is also a violent threat, with

50 SHADES OF GRAY
Gloria Grahame (right) matches Humphrey Bogart's cynical barbs beat for beat as Laurel Gray in Nicholas Ray's doomed love story *In a Lonely Place* (1950, left)

REX FEATURES (1)

IN HER EYES

Bogart's role shifting from the antihero to the antagonist, and Grahame's from the love interest to the protagonist. She poignantly captures the paralysing denial that prevents abused women from leaving, not wanting to admit her lover is someone who could hurt her, yet not quite able to ignore the red flags in front of her either. She conveys these subtleties gorgeously through the inflections in her voice, the flicker in her eyes.

Grahame claimed that all four of her husbands hit her. This makes it a sad irony that her best dramatic performances had her playing a woman in an abusive relationship. The filming couldn't have been easy for Grahame, contractually obligated to be directed by her husband, acting opposite a magnetic film star and producer who wanted his own wife in her role, not to mention the quiet separation of Grahame and Ray in the middle of filming. Likewise, it would have been easy for even the humanist filmmaker Ray to turn his movie into a misogynist revenge fantasy against a wife he hated. In the original ending, Dixon kills Laurel in the heat of their climactic argument, turning the woman he loves into the cadaver he's often written into his scripts. It was a moment of self-awareness on Ray's part that completely changed the ending in a way that transcended both the conventions of *film noir* and the Production Code, where Laurel lives but her relationship to Dix is dead. It's a move that ultimately strengthens both characters, making them far more complex than mere victim and villain, and deepening Bogart and Grahame's performances into career-finest ones.

I wonder if Grahame thrived filming movies in stressful situations for tyrannical directors. She navigated her crumbling marriage to Nick Ray in front of the camera, she lay under an elephant's foot for Cecil B. DeMille, and she was one of only a small handful of actors who worked with Fritz Lang more than once; this is, after all, a director who forced more than 20 takes on Jocelyn Brando because he wanted the steak sauce to drip down just right. If Grahame felt any burden from numerous takes while playing the happily oblivious gangster's moll Debby Marsh in Lang's *The Big Heat* (1953), there's no trace of it on screen. Grahame mines a lot of humour from lines that are more spiky *noir* than funny on paper, her 'born sexy yesterday' energy hiding a bubbling disdain when Lee Marvin tries to put her in her place; each character makes the fatal mistake of believing they can control the other.

The recipient of the film's most memorably violent scene – when Marvin's mobster throws a pot of scalding coffee in her face – Debby similarly sees the fullest extent of her lover's violence despite her denial, but unlike Laurel Gray, the attack sends her lunging into full revenge mode. Unusually for a *noir* heroine, Debby gets to find her true humanity through her friendship with moral cop Dave Bannion, both fuelled in different ways by their losses – she lost her face, he

Just as the 50s ended, so did Grahame. She just stopped. She never had another great film role, popping up instead on TV or in a B horror movie or exploitation film

NOBODY'S FOOL
Gloria Grahame in (clockwise from top left) Vincente Minnelli's *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952), Edward Dmytryk's *Crossfire* (1947), and the Fritz Lang *noirs* *The Big Heat* (1953) and *Human Desire* (1954)

lost a wife – to take down a powerful crime syndicate. The film's best scenes involve Debby subtly making Bannion remember his wife instead of merely compartmentalising her. His investigation may drive the plot forward, but Debby is the heart of *The Big Heat*, at once the vengeful femme fatale and the saint, sacrificing herself for all the sins Bannion didn't have the courage to.

The rest of Grahame's output in her most prolific decade include numerous contributions to *film noir* that had her falling more easily into the sensual femme fatale archetype, including her second film with Lang, *Human Desire* (1954). Like most great stars of the golden age, she won an Oscar for one of her less effective performances, as a Southern belle to a Faulkneresque novelist in Vincente Minnelli's *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952). Later she played the girl who couldn't say no in *Oklahoma!* (1955). And then, just as the 50s ended... so did Grahame. She just stopped. It could have been for any number of reasons: her constant insecurity about her lips resulted in a speech impediment from a number of plastic surgeries; her move to England upon marrying her third husband; or the tabloid infamy she faced when she married her former stepson Tony, the same one Nick Ray had walked in on with her. She never had another great film role after the 50s, popping up instead on TV or in a B horror movie or exploitation film, even gaining a tiny role in Jonathan Demme's comedy drama about Howard Hughes, *Melvin and Howard* (1980), where the irony surely wasn't lost on her that she was still living in the shadow of Hughes, who didn't do her career any favours during his tenure at RKO.

Even if her career quietly went into the night before her death in 1981, Grahame still left a burn mark on celluloid history. It was a conscious decision for Annette Bening to take notes from *The Big Heat* when playing a con artist in *The Grifters* (1990). Bening nails the physicality that made Grahame such an icon, but also her knack for verbally splintering people. Hell, even a dress she wears is a replica of Grahame's. Her impression of Grahame in Stephen Frears's neo-*noir* is a solid foreshadowing of how she would depict the real McCoy in *Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool*; not a carbon-copy by any physical means, but carefully capturing her girly flirtiness, softening the femme fatale notoriety the press had given her, yet still alluding to the volcano beneath the still waters.

Grahame once said that though she remembered every detail of her Hollywood career, she only wanted to remember the images, not the details. When I think of Grahame, I remember her eyes, the way a few darting glances could size a man up with dazzling intimacy and curiosity, and the slightest raise of her eyebrow could chop down even the most masculine of co-stars. Even when she wasn't in focus in a shot, her eyes were clearly doing all the listening and thinking where most actresses merely react. That was the essence of Gloria Grahame: poignant, smart and nobody's fool.

A video essay by Serena Bramble to accompany this text will be published at bfi.org.uk/sightandsound. *In a Lonely Place* and *The Big Heat* are rereleased in UK cinemas on 24 November. A Gloria Grahame season screens at BFI Southbank, London, from 13 November to 30 December

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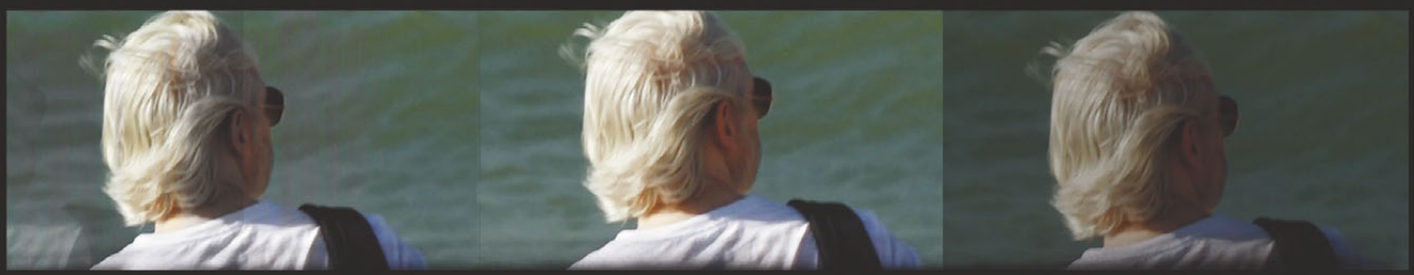

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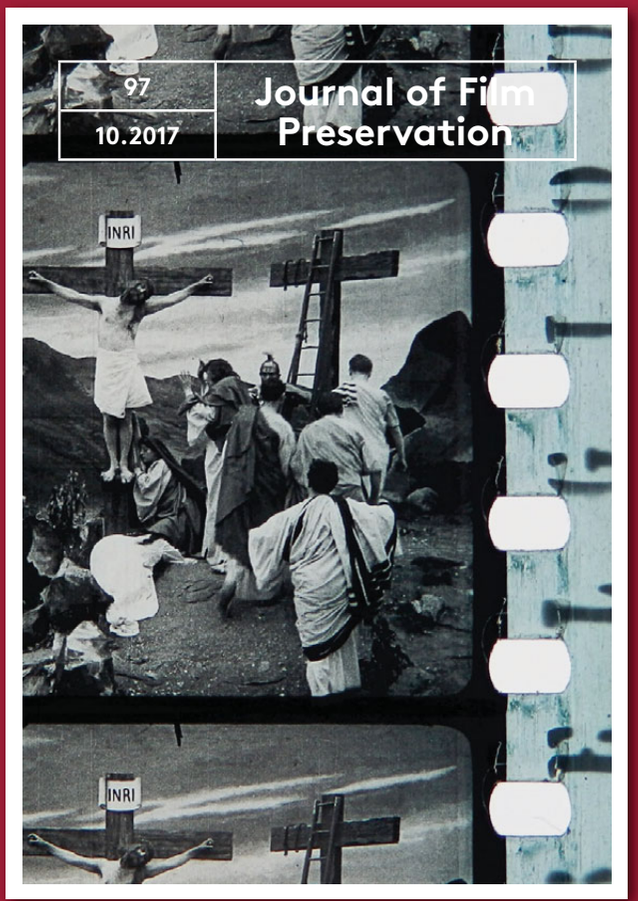

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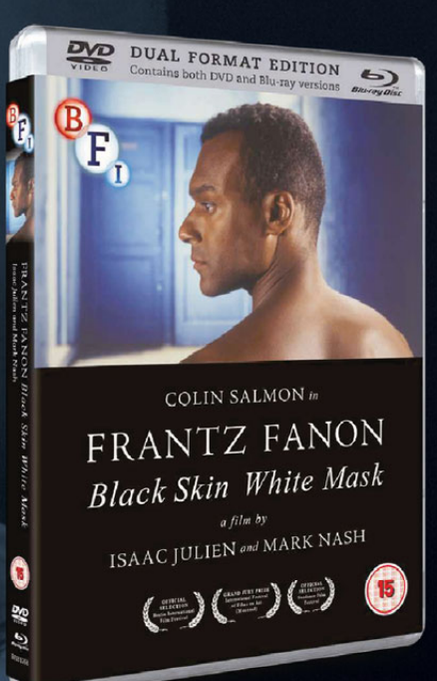

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The tree of life: Ryan Gosling as K in Denis Villeneuve's climate-ravaged future world

Blade Runner 2049

USA 2017
Director: Denis Villeneuve
Certificate 15 163m 14s

Reviewed by Tim Hayes

Sincere statements can bubble up through the gas clouds of marketing that surround event movies, and when Tom Rothman of Sony Pictures tells the *Wall Street Journal*, "If you're not in a position to make the 15th *Star Wars* movie, you have to search for things that people really feel they have got to go out to a movie theatre and see," he could be taking the opportunity to link his new co-production with the biggest game in town, or just bemoaning his lot. Andrew Kosove of Alcon Entertainment read from the same sheet to tell the *Hollywood Reporter*: "If you don't have repetitive cash flow, which is a fancy way of saying being in the sequel business, you are going to be in trouble eventually." Many people will want to go out and see Rothman and Kosove's latest baby, *Blade Runner 2049*, given the affection (though not universal) and influence (absolutely everywhere) connected with Ridley Scott's original *Blade Runner* (1982) – and they won't be put off by the fact that the producers have made the film sound as artistically spontaneous as a microchip, or the clear implication that audiences might actually be the ones in trouble.

After a critical kicking in the contemporary press – including *Sight & Sound*'s now defunct sister publication *Monthly Film Bulletin* – Scott's film has assumed the heavy mantle of quotable cultural treasure, even as the director's tinkering with the available product eroded some of its idiosyncrasy. The original lugubrious voiceover from Harrison Ford as replicant-hunter (or maybe replicant hunter) Deckard was sacrificed in later cuts as a poor fit with the intended sci-fi intensity. But the echo of *film noir* private detectives mixing booze and broads under the dry sun of Los Angeles was deliciously self-conscious, as Deckard scurried between constant downpours in an LA with seemingly no sun at all. And in any case, Scott has always left Dick Morrissey's bluesy midnight saxophone in place in Vangelis's seething soundtrack, a ghost of the original machine.

There is no voiceover in *Blade Runner 2049* and certainly no sax, constrained as it is by current pop-culture strictures that treat whimsy as an indictable war crime. But in a landscape awash with both science-fiction and revived material, the film is far above any kind of average for either. Its visual ambitions include recreations of the original film's rainy LA streets, still punctuated by blazing advertisements for Pan Am and overshadowed by obsidian corporate buildings resembling the tombs of the pharaohs, as well as new visions of a ruined Las Vegas swamped by orange sand, and a Pacific ocean swollen by climate change and held back by a vast sea wall. The interiors, especially the ones in which Christ-like business tycoon Wallace (Jared Leto) and his replicant enforcer Luv (Sylvia Hoeks) scheme, are art installations. At one point Luv calls down a missile strike on her foes while reclined at a spectacular diagonal on a white lounge chair as she has her nails done, golden reflections of water dancing not just on the ceiling, as in Scott films of old and their imitators, but on every planar surface in the room.

The film starts in a lower key, at a rural farmstead that turns out to be hiding a dead body, a parallel situation to the beginning of director Denis Villeneuve's last film but one, *Sicario* (2015). A narrative from original co-writer Hampton Fancher and Michael Green continues the first film's plot and reveals what happened to Deckard and fugitive replicant Rachael (Sean Young), while

Do the female characters Joi and Luv reflect the misogyny of the men who made the film, or the misanthropy of the character who manufactured them in the story?

Kick ass: Sylvia Hoeks as the villainous replicant Luv

conspicuously re-muddying the issue of whether Deckard himself is ordinary flesh and blood. The protagonist is now K, a Blade Runner well aware of his artificial nature and initially content about it; he is played by Ryan Gosling with a wan stoicism adjacent to Ford's more droll demeanour from 1982, though it comes to look a bit forced when Ford himself arrives and reclaims his territory.

After four previous features in English, the French-Canadian Villeneuve has become a divisive filmmaker, which raises questions about the mindset audiences bring to the movies these days. His interest in the psychogeography of landscapes produces some digitally augmented high-altitude interrogations of *Blade Runner 2049*'s world, like the ones that probed his earlier films' Toronto, Mexico and Montana settings from above. He also believes that images can spur feelings without the support of explanations, which you might think would be the default among practitioners in his line of work but palpably is not. What some of the film's grace notes mean is left up to you. A technique used to probe K's state of mind seems closer to CIA mental torture or an audio parallax test than the calm Q&A of *Blade Runner*'s polygraph-style Voight-Kampff machine used to assess whether an individual is a replicant; but then this society loathes its android underclass and wishes it agony. Wallace, current manufacturer of replicants after acquiring the technology from the original movie's Tyrell Corporation – not the least of the new film's knowing details is that failed intellectual property never goes away – uses a snippet of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* as his corporate jingle; it rings out every time K switches on his Wallace-made holographic companion Joi (Ana de Armas), like a laptop's start-up chime. But is that Russian signage on the farm equipment that has made Wallace's fortune? Looks that way.

Once Deckard arrives, the film has an implicit playful side, but the *Blade Runner* questions of old are perennially serious, seen here in the relationship between K and Joi, false humans both: the authenticity of memory and identity, the nature of childhood regret, and whether a slave culture can be reformed without first burning to the ground. The film dares to be ambiguous about those questions too, but ambiguity is a bad fit with the current critical mood that art must be prescriptive rather than reflective. It's the poser of the age: do the female characters named Joi and Luv reflect the misogyny of the men who made the film, or the misanthropy of the character who manufactured them? Is the future Las Vegas adorned with female statues because the film is crass, or because it's set in Las Vegas? Is it more significant that they are naked, or that they are in ruins?

An answer crystallises in the sort-of sex scene between K, Joi and replicant prostitute Mariette (Mackenzie Davis, cast and costumed to resemble Daryl Hannah's Pris in the first film), in which the translucent hologram and the solid escort overlap in space but drift in and out of alignment, two superimposed sprites running their fingers through K's hair. It's wilfully free of arousal, sub-zero foreplay to some grim threesome over the abyss in which no one is allowed direct contact with anyone, and at least one observer thought it deeply aware of his gender's insecurities about the nature of pleasure given or received. No male with half-decent self-knowledge could fail to register Mariette/Joi's final spliced accusatory gaze looking back at him without at least a twinge. In short, the film pauses for a dig at masculinity before moving on. That's not the only interpretation, but it's one that opts not to take images at face value alone, or lumber *Blade Runner 2049* with the task of fixing society rather than interrogating it first. At some point the wish that art would present answers rather than questions turns into the wish that art would just go away.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Andrew A. Kosove
Broderick Johnson
Bud Yorkin
Cynthia Sikes Yorkin
Screenplay
Hampton Fancher
Michael Green
Story
Hampton Fancher
Based on characters from the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick
Director of Photography
Roger A. Deakins
Editor
Joe Walker
Production Designer
Dennis Gassner
Music
Benjamin Wallfisch
Hans Zimmer
Supervising Sound
Mark Mangini
Costume Designer
Renée April
Visual Effects
Double Negative
Framestore
MPC
BUF
Universal Production Partners
Rodeo FX
Atomic Fiction
Supervising Stunt Co-ordinator
Joel Kramer
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Production Companies
Alcon Entertainment presents in association with Columbia Pictures a Ridley Scott, Alcon Entertainment, Bud Yorkin production in association with Torridon Films and 16:14 Entertainment
A Denis Villeneuve film
Executive Producers
Ridley Scott
Bill Carraro
Tim Gamble
Frank Giustra
Yale Badik
Val Hill

Cast

Ryan Gosling
KD6-3.7, 'K'
Harrison Ford
Rick Deckard
Ana de Armas
Joi
Sylvia Hoeks
Luv
Robin Wright
Lieutenant Joshi
Mackenzie Davis
Mariette
Carla Juri
Dr Ana Stelline
Lennie James
Mister Cotton
Sean Young
Rachael
Edward James Olmos
Gaff
Dave Bautista
Sapper Morton
Jared Leto
Niander Wallace
Barkhad Abdi
Doc Badger
Hiam Abbass
Freysa
Wood Harris
Nandez
David Dastmalchian
Coco

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]
IMAX prints:
[1.9:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

Los Angeles, 2049. K, a bioengineered replicant, works for the police as a Blade Runner, hunting older replicants who have gone rogue. He lives with a holographic companion, Joi. At the scene of a completed mission, K discovers the bones of a replicant female, dead for decades. Tests indicate that she died in childbirth, but police chief Joshi orders the findings suppressed, fearing that discovery of replicant sexual reproduction will inflame the already tense relations between replicants and humans. K visits Wallace, manufacturer of the replicants. He learns that the bones are those of a female named Rachael, who disappeared in 2019 along with Deckard, a former Blade Runner. Wallace, who has covertly been trying to engineer replicant reproduction himself, sends his replicant assistant Luv to steal Rachael's bones from the police and follow K as he seeks the child. K visits Ana Stelline, designer of the replicants' false memories. He comes to believe that he himself is Rachael's child and may also have a twin. The trail leads K and Joi to a ruined Las Vegas, where they locate Deckard in hiding. Luv attacks, deactivating Joi and taking Deckard to Wallace for interrogation. A replicant liberation movement intervenes and rescues K, informing him that there is only one child, and it is Stelline. K saves Deckard and defeats Luv after a violent struggle. He appears to be fatally injured, lying back to gaze at the sky as Deckard goes to meet his daughter.

Centre of gravity: Isabelle Huppert as Anne

Happy End

France/Germany/Austria/Italy 2017
Director: Michael Haneke
Certificate 15 107m 35s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

In what has to be considered a minor upset by Cannes standards, *Happy End* was the first Michael Haneke joint to leave the festival without a major prize since 2003's *Time of the Wolf* (unofficially ruled ineligible since jury president Patrice Chéreau appeared in a cameo). With the possible exceptions of Lars von Trier and the Dardennes, with whom he forms a sort of holy – or, for some, unholy – trinity of contemporary award-bait auteurs, no European filmmaker has been as decorated at Cannes over the past decade and a half. And so *Happy End*'s empty-handed haul, in a consensus off-year for the main competition, was taken, both on the ground and at a distance, as evidence of failure.

Cut to several months later, and it looks as if *Happy End* is Haneke's most interesting film since *Hidden* (2005), and also superior to his back-to-back Palme d'Or winners *The White Ribbon* (2009) and *Amour* (2012), which succeeded mainly in making their creator's bitterness more tasteful, if not downright palatable. (Suffice to say that seeing the author of an anti-establishment tract like 1989's *The Seventh Continent* smiling on stage at the Oscars generated some cognitive dissonance.) *Happy End* employs the same jagged, deliberately disorienting style of works such as *Benny's Video* (1992) and *Code Unknown* (2000) – complex films that hold up even in the wake of their arguably pernicious influence on 21st-century global art cinema (no less than Quentin Tarantino, Haneke is apt to take the rap in some circles for the sins of his imitators).

Happy End unfolds in short, oblique scenes, including a number of video recordings whose authorship is either mysterious (à la *Hidden* and its unlabelled videotapes) or purposefully disembodied (as in security footage of an industrial accident). Context is absent; exposition is non-existent. This return to form(alism) is self-conscious, and one way to read – and quickly dismiss – *Happy End* is to characterise it as a greatest hits album of sorts, with all the old Haneke classics, from sociopathic teens and monstrously self-involved bourgeois parents to class warfare, racism and assisted suicide in one handy tracklist. Such a characterisation, while not inaccurate, ignores the subtle but significant shift in the material towards a lighter, though hardly benign, seriocomic tone.

Previously, the presence of humour in Haneke's films was a cruelly theoretical proposition, as in the wicked situationist gags riddling *Funny Games* (1997), a film that still stands as the height of its maker's pedantry. Not only is *Happy End* less imperious and prescriptive than its predecessors, it's also more generous, both to its characters and to the audience. Because its ensemble has been conceived in terms of idiosyncratic individuals rather than stand-ins for larger forces, it seems far more possible than in the single-minded *White Ribbon* or *Amour* that different viewers will take different things away from the experience.

As in *Code Unknown*, Haneke provides multiple points of entry into the narrative: *Happy End* disperses its point of view across a large group of characters, any one of whom could plausibly qualify as the main protagonist. Isabelle Huppert projects her usual low, steady centre of gravity as Anne Laurent, a driven real-estate developer who is outwardly the sturdiest branch of her clan's gnarled, ingrown family tree. She's sharper than her soft-boy brother Thomas (Mathieu Kassovitz), a prosperous doctor who's been forced to bring 13-year-old Eve (Fatine Harduin), his daughter from a previous marriage, to live with him and his second wife and their infant child; she lords it over her own son Pierre (Franz Rogowski) with some of

the acid condescension she displayed as the alpha-mama in *Elle* (2016). And yet Anne's attempts to downplay a workplace calamity and Huppert's powerhouse acting ultimately exist to the side of what's really fascinating in *Happy End*, which is the slow, steady, unsettling bond that forms between Eve and her heretofore all-but-estranged grandfather Georges (Jean-Louis Trintignant).

It's strongly implied, as *Happy End* goes on, that Trintignant is playing the same Georges Laurent he did in *Amour*, a bit of continuity that is (intentionally) undermined by the fact that the daughter figure played by Huppert in that film was named Eva, not Anne. This intertextual funny-gamesmanship doesn't detract from the fact that Trintignant is allowed to be much wittier this time out; instead of acting slow-burning grief at his wife's physical and mental dissolution, he expertly essays the impatience of a man who'd rather be dead himself. There are several scenes in which Georges, who is confined to a wheelchair, tries to arrange his own demise, and all of them are played for mordant, deadpan comedy, including a slow tracking shot following him as he rolls down a street and tries to provoke a group of dark-skinned men to attack him – an outrageous tableau rendered more provocative by the muffled sound design.

Georges's death-wish intersects comfortably with his granddaughter's morbid pathology. It's made clear from the outset that Eve is a potential murderer: she force-feeds her pet hamster antidepressants and films the results on her iPhone. It's also implied that she may have been responsible for her mother's near-fatal drug overdose – a mystery that isn't all that mysterious. As sensitively played by Harduin, Eve isn't a culturally symptomatic figure like the eponymous TV junkie of *Benny's Video*. Rather, she's a perceptive, believably resentful young teen, pondering her imminent entry into a world of adults that's disappointing from every angle. Georges's apparent confirmation of her suspicions – that to grow old is to drift ever further from any kind of plausible innocence – balances cynicism against an implicit empathy. And so it goes with many of the film's best moments, which open up beyond (or beneath) their surface scepticism. A clandestine online correspondence is at once embarrassingly florid and movingly confessional; a scene where Eve is asked to mind her infant half-brother pulses with anxiety as well as tenderness; a stunt at a well-heeled family gathering is outrageous in ways that embarrass its perpetrator as thoroughly as his intended targets.

It's this same quality of embarrassment – of people feeling exposed to themselves or to others – that accounts for *Happy End*'s queasy hilarity. When petulant, self-pitying Pierre does a karaoke rendition of Sia's chart-topping 'Chandelier' (a well-chosen song, as it's about feeling out of control), his exhibitionistic abandon is either pathetic or cathartic, take your pick. At his worst, Haneke is a scold who makes cinema to excoriate – his characters, his audience, the whole rotten world. *Happy End* evinces the same scepticism as Haneke's other movies about a wealthy Western ruling class insulated against certain wide-angle realities, and yet for once, the critique feels light-fingered and not heavy-handed. The film suggests nothing so much as a compressed season of some heaving, melodramatic soap opera, parcelled out in glistening, judicious digital-video shards. Following *Amour*, I wasn't sure I ever wanted to see another Haneke film, but the modest but genuine breakthrough of *Happy End* feels a bit like a fresh start.

One way to characterise it is as a greatest hits album of sorts, with sociopathic teens, monstrously self-involved bourgeois parents, class warfare and racism

Wedding crashers: Harduin, Trintignant, Huppert, Verlinden, Jones, Kassovitz

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Margaret Menegoz
Stefan Arndt
Veit Heiduschka
Michael Katz
Supervising Producer
Margaret Menegoz
Screenplay/ Dialogue
Michael Haneke
Director of Photography
Christian Berger
Edited by
Monika Willi
Production Designer
Olivier Radot
Sound
Guillaume Sciama
Jean-Pierre Laforce
Denise Gerrard
Costume Designer
Catherine Leterrier

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Production Companies
Les Films Du Losange, X Filme Creative Pool, Wega Film present a film by Michael Haneke
Co-produced by ARTE France Cinéma, France 3 Cinéma, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Bayerischer Rundfunk, Arte
In co-operation with Arte France, France Télévisions, Canal +, Ciné+, ORF Film/ Fernseh-Abkommen
With the support of Cinema Srl, Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée, Pictanovo, Région Hauts-de-France, Filmförderungsanstalt, CNC/FFA Minitraite, Österreichisches Filminstitut, Filmfonds Wien, Eurimages

Cast

Isabelle Huppert
Anne Laurent
Jean-Louis Trintignant
Georges Laurent
Mathieu Kassovitz
Thomas Laurent
Fantine Harduin
Ève Laurent
Franz Rogowski
Pierre Laurent
Laura Verlinden
Anaïs Laurent
Toby Jones
Lawrence Bradshaw
Hassam Ghancy
Rachid
Nabiha Akkari
Jamila
Dominique Besnehard
Marcel, hairdresser

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Curzon Artificial Eye

Calais, the present. Following an accident at a construction site in which a worker is killed, real-estate developer Anne Laurent is advised to seek a settlement with the victim's family. At the same time, her brother Thomas, a doctor, announces that his 13-year-old daughter Eve is coming to stay with the family for the summer because her mother – his ex-wife – has overdosed on medication and is in the hospital. Eve, who may have been responsible for her mother's overdose by deliberately poisoning her, discovers that Thomas is cheating on his new wife and confronts him about it. She also begins a tentative but intense friendship with her grandfather Georges, whose contempt for everyone around him barely masks a suicidal despair. Anne tries to get her son Pierre to deal with the workplace situation but he's ineffectual and spirals into a guilty depression. Eve forces Thomas to break off his affair. Georges tries to find somebody to help him commit suicide, and only Eve is receptive to the suggestion. The family gathers for Anne's wedding to a colleague, which Pierre drunkenly interrupts by inviting a group of migrant workers as a way of shaming the guests. Georges asks to be excused, and Eve wheels him down to the sea and into the water so that he can drown himself. She begins filming his final moments on her cell phone but Anne and Thomas arrive and rescue him.

The Ornithologist

Portugal/France/Brazil 2016
Director: João Pedro Rodrigues

Reviewed by Cristina Alvarez López and Adrian Martin

In 1960, the Mauritian writer and mystic Malcolm de Chazal declared that what really matters in life and in art is "not only a person looking at a flower, but also the flower looking back at that person"; only once we grasp this two-way relation between humanity and nature, he claimed, can we hope to repeal our primal "expulsion from the Garden of Eden". Portuguese director João Pedro Rodrigues today reinvents this species of cosmic longing, laced with the type of inevitably self-conscious irony we have long come to associate with postmodernism in philosophy and the arts. Nonetheless, he holds out for that return to blessed innocence of which de Chazal dreamed.

The Ornithologist is, at an immediate level, a disarmingly simple, straightforward, even wilfully naive tale. Opening with a quotation from St Anthony of Lisbon – whose presence and influence will later loom large in the tale – it begins in serene suspension. For its first 16 minutes, the film holds off on any narrative intrigue whatsoever. Fernando dwells within nature as its patient researcher, disturbing nothing. Séverine Ballon's superb, microtonal score for violoncello is used sparingly. Rodrigues has joked that he wanted the audience to wonder, at this stage, whether they were watching a story about an adventuring guy, or a documentary on birdlife.

When an accident finally intervenes to kick off the plot, Fernando becomes the classic 'dispossessed' hero, losing almost everything he owns (Anthony, we may recall, is the patron saint of lost things). He follows an essentially passive but richly eventful path of chance encounters. A comically sinister pair of ultra-Christian Chinese tourists give Fernando his first taste of quasi-spiritual transfiguration, binding him in ropes and arranging his hanging body like a martyred saint.

Later apparitions include a strange crew of youngsters who perform somersaults off rocks and cry "Give all you've got!" as they party on; and a museum-like display of animals spread out in the forest – stuffed and mounted, yet still emitting their distinctive noises. There are touches of high camp humour, such as the Chinese duo giggling over the prospect of castrating Fernando, and a band of Amazonian women conversing in Latin. There are also moments of dread, conveyed less in the deliberately artificial displays of horror (as in a Raúl Ruiz film, people veritably shower fake blood from their cut throats) than in quieter passages, such as the journey of the camera through a darkened tunnel.

Generally, however, *The Ornithologist* plays down the conventions of horror cinema. As in *Odete* (2005) or *The Last Time I Saw Macao* (2012, co-directed with his regular collaborator João Rui Guerra da Mata), Rodrigues prefers a gentle narrative drift in which even the most ostensibly melodramatic or outlandish complications arise rather matter-of-factly. There is an overarching sense that life is a dream, or a trance-state – hence the motif of Fernando continually waking up and finding himself in a new, altered situation, and simply adapting to it as he continues on his 'pilgrim's progress'.

It is not difficult to draw a lively network of recent films and filmmakers around *The Ornithologist* in this regard: Apichatpong Weerasethakul (who also likes to interpolate photographic stills into the flow), *Knight of Cups* by Terrence Malick (a famous birdwatcher) – even *Twin Peaks: The Return*, since the ominous owls that seem to have largely fled David Lynch's imagination take pride of place here.

Rodrigues, a key participant with da Mata in contemporary Portuguese cinema, is an extremely articulate filmmaker – maybe too much so. In interviews, he almost pre-empts any reviewer by laying out the full ledger

Lovebirds: Paul Hamy and Xelo Cagiao in João Pedro Rodrigues's playful mishmash of ancient and modern mythologies

Hope floats: the dispossessed hero Fernando

Beyond its same-sex couples and camp humour, there is an evident drive to blend Christian iconography with all that is joyfully pagan and perverse

of his conscious references, allusions and sources. It's a collage, he tells us, a playful mishmash of ancient and modern mythologies: everything from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the Judeo-Christian Bible to New Testament apocrypha and contemporary teenage initiation rituals (hence the kids prancing around in colourful animal and fish costumes).

Filmic citations also abound. The 1950s American westerns of Budd Boetticher and Anthony Mann leave their mark not only on the steady, widescreen, long-shot framing of bodies in landscapes, but also on the patient attention to physical detail, such as Fernando freeing himself from rope knots, crossing a stream or picking fruit.

If *The Ornithologist* amounted only to a postmodern 'spot the quotation' game, it would not long detain us. The undeniable enchantment it weaves derives from other, deeper levels of its style and structure. Returning to Chazal's mystical intuition of the two-way look between humanity and nature, we can usefully add to it Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of a reciprocal 'becoming': as the person begins to become a flower, so too the flower becomes a person. Rodrigues devotes all his creative energy to picturing this type of mutual transformation, especially in relation to animals and humans.

Much sport is had with the literal but distinctively cinematic device of the point-of-view shot. At the beginning, Fernando is defined in his *métier* as the guy always gazing through binoculars, framing and focusing his objects of inquiry. Thanks to the doctored, lo-fi optic of a GoPro camera, Rodrigues reverses this relation and gives us the bird's-eye view of Fernando: fuzzy around the edges, with intense patches of colour. What may not be immediately obvious to every viewer is that, in these shots, Fernando is usually no longer played by Hamy: it is Rodrigues himself, whose alternative incarnation as the central character is only properly revealed, in close-up, in the film's penultimate, dramatic scene.

So, to put it schematically, Hamy is Fernando while Rodrigues is Anthony. The film dramatises the loss of one earthly identity and the adoption of another 'higher' plane of being. Fernando begins this journey as a confirmed sceptic: "Spirits don't exist," he tells Lin and Fei. "There is no such thing as the Devil – or God." Later events shake this conviction. He gradually finds himself stepping into the shoes of St Anthony – at first bewildered by the huntresses who address him as such after admiring his easy intimacy with animals (another part of the saint's legend), but eventually frankly declaring, "I am Anthony." Starting off as a rationalist who catalogues and documents, Fernando/Anthony is reborn as somebody who respects the forces beyond him.

Rodrigues professes to be himself not spiritual by nature, but drawn to the unusual models of narration and representation offered by religious painting. There, an entire myth or legend is condensed into a single, charged, iconic gesture – to which the modern viewer can either bring a wider background knowledge or simply take as a spectacle in all its dislocated surreality. "You see whatever you want to see," Rodrigues has declared.

But one thing he surely does want us to see is the profoundly queer character of *The Ornithologist*. Beyond the fact of its proliferating same-sex couples and playfully camp humour, there is an evident drive to blend Christian iconography with all that is joyfully pagan and perverse. An early glimpse of Fei licking the cut on Lin's knee is a mere preview of Fernando/Anthony's erotic exploration of Jesus/Thomas's vagina-shaped knife wound (such echoing or doubling of actions runs all through the film). Equally queer is Rodrigues's career-long devotion to the inevitable drifting, sliding and mutual becoming of identities.

Barnett Newman once drolly remarked: "Aesthetics is for artists what ornithology is for the birds." What Rodrigues proposes to us, instead, is something more queerly hybrid: aesthetics and intuition, fleshy paganism and esoteric spiritualism, mind and matter, commingling and singing together.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
João Figueiras
Diogo Varela Silva
Screenplay
João Pedro Rodrigues
João Rui Guerra da Mata
Cinematography
Rui Poças
Editor
Raphaël Lefèvre
Production Designer
João Rui Guerra da Mata
Original Music
Séverine Ballon
Sound Recordist/ Editor/Mixer
Nuno Carvalho
Wardrobe
Patrícia Dória

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Production Companies
Blackmaria, House on Fire, Ítaca Films Brasil presents in co-production with Le Fresnoy - Studio national des arts contemporains
With the support of Instituto do Cinema e do Audiovisual, Ministério da Cultura, Rádio e Televisãode Portugal, Centre national de la Cinématographie et de l'Image Animée, Ministère des affaires étrangères et du développement international, Institut Français, ANCINE
A film by João Pedro Rodrigues
Financed by Instituto do Cinema e do Audiovisual, Ministério da Cultura, Radio e Televisao de Portugal, Aide aux cinémas du monde, Centre national de la Cinématographie et de l'Image Animée, Ministère des affaires étrangères et du développement international, Institut Français, Le Fresnoy - Studio National des Arts Contemporains
Produced with public funds operated and managed by Agência Nacional do Cinema - ANCINE

Cast
Paul Hamy
Fernando, 'Anthony' version 1
Xelo Cagiao
Jesus/Tomé
João Pedro Rodrigues
Fernando, 'Anthony' version 2
Han Wen
Fei
Chan Suan
Lin
Juliane Elting
blonde huntress

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Matchbox

Portuguese theatrical title
O Ornitólogo

Portugal, present day. Fernando, an ornithologist, is caught in rapids while travelling along a river; he loses his canoe and passes out. Two Chinese tourists, Lin and Fei, who have been on the St James pilgrimage, are lost in the forest. They discover Fernando and revive him. Waking the next morning, Fernando finds that he has been tied up; he frees himself and escapes. At a campsite, he discovers traces of a bizarre ritual. At night, he is disturbed by a group of costumed revellers who carry flaming torches and kill a boar. Fernando meets Jesus, a deaf shepherd; they swim and make love. Believing that Jesus has stolen from him, Fernando starts a fight that ends in Jesus's accidental death. Fleeing, Fernando finds an abandoned church; he is awoken from his dream by a white dove, whose broken wing he mends. In the forest, Fernando sees frozen models of animals. At a stream, near a human skull, he finds his medical supplies and ID card, but throws them away. Heating up a nail, he burns off his fingerprints. Female hunters on horseback shoot Fernando, but he wakes up unharmed; he is now addressed as Anthony, and constantly trailed by the dove. Anthony comes upon the corpse of a reveller who appears to be Jesus; when resuscitated by mouth, however, he identifies himself as Thomas, Jesus's twin brother. Thomas murders his rescuer. The following day, in Padova, Anthony and Thomas walk hand in hand; Anthony blesses, across traffic, an excited Lin and Fei.

Antiporno

Japan 2016
Director: Sono Sion

Reviewed by Jasper Sharp

One of the main points of interest of Japan's erotic cinema during its golden age of the 1970s and 1980s is that, as long as a nude or sex scene was included roughly every ten minutes, its directors had a relative degree of leeway to express themselves in the 75- to 90-minute runtime, provided they kept within the strict non-pubic constraints of censorship body Eirin. This surprising creative freedom is held to be a particular feature of the 'Roman Porno' films produced en masse by the major studio Nikkatsu between 1971 and 1988. The brand name, sometimes described as deriving from the contradictory terms of 'romantic' and 'pornography', was in fact a contraction of the French term for the erotic novel, *roman pornographique*, the literary associations intended to lend the Nikkatsu product a more sophisticated cachet over the cheapjack independently produced *pinku eiga*, or 'pink films'.

Nevertheless, for all such artistic aspirations, Nikkatsu's wholesale dissemination of these relatively bigger-budgeted widescreen celebrations of youthful and primarily female sensuality into the commercial mainstream didn't go entirely uncontested. Within months, a public prosecution was mounted, stretching on until the studio's acquittal in 1980 (though surprisingly Nikkatsu's prolific Roman Porno output continued unabated during this period). The trial raised debates surrounding semantic and legal definitions of both 'art' and 'obscenity' in Japan; Oshima Nagisa added his voice to the fray, with the French-financed *In the Realm of the Senses* (1975) produced as a reaction to Roman Porno's representational tropes.

The title of self-styled provocateur Sono Sion's entry in Nikkatsu's Roman Porno Reboot series (released in the UK alongside Shiota Akihiko's *Wet Woman in the Wind*, reviewed on p. 56 of this issue) spells out clearly the angle he sees himself coming from in the art-versus-pornography debate. The boldest and most individualistic of the five Reboot films, *Antiporno* presents a giddy meta-narrative that spirals around a wilful young novelist named Kyoko and her dominatrix relationship with her personal assistant Noriko. As an interview and photoshoot in her home with the staff of a glossy lifestyle magazine descends into an orgy of depravity, the rug is pulled and it is revealed that the scene as presented is in fact being shot for a Roman Porno production. Furthermore, behind the scenes, it is Kyoko who is shown as the target of bullying and humiliation from both her director and her co-star for not being convincing enough, triggering off a nightmarish and fragmentary journey into her traumatic sexual past.

Visually, *Antiporno* is an undeniable *tour de force*. Vivid primary reds, yellows and blues demarcate the separate zones of the expansive studio apartment that forms the principal location; light streams through venetian blinds and industrial fans but the apartment is otherwise sparsely decorated, save for Kyoko's portraits of characters from her novels propped up against one wall and a movie portraying her rude deflowering as a schoolgirl in a bleak autumnal forest projected against another.

Sono lays bare and subverts the classic Roman Porno formula. Eroticism takes a backseat amongst the garish décor, grotesque characters and histrionic performances, while the regular parade of full-frontal nude female bodies is presented in clinically objective long shots, reiterating Oshima's argument that obscenity is defined more by what is kept outside the frame than shown within it. Some interesting ideas are expressed about Japanese women's imprisonment in a culture of sexual commodification, the expectations of female peer-group pressure and the oppressiveness of the male gaze. But Sono's bombastic approach, as Kyoko hysterically spouts sub-Sadean sophisms about the nature of freedom, is neither as subtle nor as considered as Oshima's – perhaps unsurprisingly given that the director's prodigious output currently averages around three to four films a year.

With such taboo-tackling titles as *Suicide Club* (2002), *Love Exposure* (2008) and *Guilty of Romance* (2011), Sono is a director who has made 'transgressiveness' his signature, and *Antiporno* is nothing if not a Sono Sion film: surreal, unpredictable, brash and more than a little glib. Indeed, so self-conscious is the auteurial presence, one wonders why he just didn't name the film *F for Fuck*.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Naoko Komuro
Masahiko Takahashi
Written by
Sono Sion
Cinematographer
Maki Ito
Editor
Junichi Ito
Production Designer
Takashi Matsuzuka
Music
Susumu Akizuki
Sound Mixer
Hironori Ito
Costume Designer
Kazuhiro Sawataishi

Production Companies
Presented and distributed by Nikkatsu
Production
Django Film
in association with
SKY PerfecTV!
Chief Executive Producer
Keizo Yuri
Executive Producer
Tadashi Tanaka

Cast
Ami Tomite
Kyoko
Mariko Tsutsui
Noriko
Fujiko
Sayaka Kotani
Tomo Uchino
Hirari Ikeda
Ami
Saki
Yuya Takayama
Mana Yoshimuta
Ami Fukuda
Ai Shimomura
Dai Hasegawa
Takumi Bando

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributors
MUBI
ICA

Japanese theatrical title
Anchiporuno

Present day. Kyoko, a celebrated novelist and artist, awakens naked on her bed, an empty bottle containing a lizard beside her. She pirouettes around her room while her illusionary sister sings at the piano. The doorbell rings and Kyoko's personal assistant Noriko arrives with the day's schedule. Kyoko orders Noriko on to all fours and leads her around the room like a dog. An interviewer, photographer and two lesbian assistants arrive to interview Kyoko for a glossy magazine feature. Kyoko orders Noriko to strip, and the two lesbians begin having sex on her bed.

The whole scene is revealed to be part of an adult film shoot. The director and 'Noriko' berate 'Kyoko' for her unconvincing performance. The narrative fragments into her past, present and imaginary life. Contemporary retakes of the scene are intermingled with sequences from her adolescence, her possible abuse at the hands of her father, the rape in a forest that resulted in the loss of her virginity, and her casting call for a Roman Porno film.

Battle of the Sexes

USA/United Kingdom 2017
Directors: Valerie Faris, Jonathan Dayton
Certificate 12A 121m 28s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Tennis drama *Battle of the Sexes* doesn't distinguish itself on any front in terms of quality, but it does bear the dubious distinction of being maybe the most literal-minded American movie of 2017. It's a film in which the function of every single scene can be labelled and identified just as surely as can the parts under your car's bonnet – an airtight, self-defining piece of work with nary a hairline crack through which a single grain of ambiguity might make its way.

The movie, co-directed by married duo Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, divides its attentions between the parallel stories of the real-life Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs, played by Emma Stone and Steve Carell, the latter previously directed by Dayton and Faris in their Sundance phenom *Little Miss Sunshine*, released in 2006, which in the current market seems only slightly more proximate than the world of Méliès and the Lumières.

Stone and Carell don't share the screen until rather late in the film, after the ink is dry on their 1973 contract to play a grudge match for the bragging rights of an entire gender. Up until this point the movie toggles back and forth between their parallel narratives, a structural conceit that proves to be the most interesting thing *Battle of the Sexes* has going for it. The movie does precious little with it, though, other than to attempt some comparison between both characters' disorderly personal lives. King is discovering her predilection for members of the same sex, as an out-of-left-field fling with hairdresser Marilyn (Andrea Riseborough) creates tension with her husband (Austin Stowell, a shoe-in to play Fred in any future *Scooby-Doo* reboot). King's abiding passion is tennis, to be prioritised before all relationships, regardless of gender. In Riggs's case it's gambling that drives a wedge between him and his heiress wife (Elisabeth Shue).

Any emotional anguish is kept to a tasteful minimum, however. King's story is a slow and steady road towards self-acceptance and victory in front of an audience of millions, lined with signposts indicating Preening Patriarchy (Bill Pullman's United States Lawn Tennis Association honcho) and Affirming Ally (Alan Cummings's tennis couturier Ted Tinling). As played by Stone, King is humble, principled and totally free of any hint of moral failing – the deceit of her affair, we are given to understand, is more to be laid at the feet of an uncomprehending society, and her husband is accordingly a sport about the whole thing. The agitating Riggs has rather more potential as a character, but in Carell's hands becomes another of the actor's prop-reliant grotesqueries, defined by a set of snaggle teeth and consigned to capering and sad-clown postures.

The historical 'Battle of the Sexes' was the result of recognisable narrative tropes being imposed on a game by the media, taking their cues from Riggs. It's an outsized version of what happens daily in broadcast booths around the world – and to interrogate this process, even a little bit, might have made *Battle of the Sexes* a movie worth talking about. Instead, the filmmakers extend the title contest's sense of outsized world-historical import into every aspect of their heroine's life, as in Tinling's final words to King, which find

Racket science: Emma Stone

him becoming an avatar from an enlightened future: "Someday we will be free to be who we are. And love who we love." While *Battle of the Sexes* pays close attention to period detail, it robs its moment of history of its internal integrity, making it serve as a stairway to the present. Retelling a well-known story, it clearly prefers a pre-packaged linear progressive narrative to human life and its random swervings.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Christian Colson
Danny Boyle
Robert Graf
Written by
Simon Beaufoy
Director of Photography
Linus Sandgren
Film Editor
Pamela Martin
Production Designer
Judy Becker
Music by/Music Conducted by
Nicholas Britell
Production Sound Mixer
Lisa Pinero
Costume Designer
Mary Zophres

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Production Companies
Fox Searchlight Pictures presents a Decibel Films/Cloud Eight Films production
A Valerie Faris & Jonathan Dayton film
Made in association with Ingenious Media
Produced in association with Manigot Productions

Cast

Emma Stone
Billie Jean King
Steve Carell
Bobby Riggs
Andrea Riseborough
Marilyn Barnett
Sarah Silverman
Gladys Heldman
Bill Pullman
Jack Kramer
Alan Cumming
Cuthbert Tinling, 'Ted'
Elisabeth Shue
Priscilla Riggs
Austin Stowell
Larry King
Natalie Morales
Rosie Casals

Dolby Digital/DTS/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

US, 1972-73. Tennis player Billie Jean King breaks with the United States Lawn Tennis Association over its failure to offer equal prize money for male and female players, co-founding the Virginia Slims professional women's tennis tour. The publicity attracts Bobby Riggs, a 55-year-old former Wimbledon champion, who challenges 29-year-old King to a 'Battle of the Sexes' but is rebuffed. On the road with the Virginia Slims tour, the married King begins an affair with hairdresser Marilyn, which her husband discovers. Riggs draws Margaret Court into an exhibition match, which he wins. Meanwhile he is coping with difficulties in his own marriage. He exploits his newfound notoriety to try to force a match with King. King, who has broken up with Marilyn, finally accepts the challenge. On the day of the match, Marilyn arrives to do King's hair, and an understanding is reached between them. King trounces Riggs, who reconciles with his wife.

Beach Rats

USA 2017
Director: Eliza Hittman
Certificate 15 98m 18s

Straight talking: Harris Dickinson

See Rushes, page 8

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Sublimated grief sharpens an already troublesome sexual appetite in this atmospheric sophomore feature, and only drugged oblivion offers respite from doubt and angst. Though it can be a challenge to sustain sympathy for protagonist Frankie, a Brooklyn teenager whose private crisis over his sexuality causes him to treat his sister, mother, girlfriend and secret male lovers with escalating cruelty, British actor Harris Dickinson brings an extraordinary depth to his portrayal. Through Dickinson's subtle flickers of expression, we observe the struggle between conformism and integrity that rages under Frankie's surface cool: his joy at being accepted, either by a fly-by-night cruising companion or by his thuggish heterosexual friend group; and his raw fear of having his secret exposed.

In the aftermath of his father's slow death from cancer, Frankie seems compelled to bring together his two lives, as daytime 'beach rat' and nocturnal subscriber to online gay chatrooms. It's a prospect that lends a doomy suspense to the narrative, but also bears the clear ring of psychological truth. Frankie's desires – to be ordinary and also special, totally straight and also openly gay, satisfied but also numb – may be mutually exclusive but are no less intense for it. To sustain credibility with his buff, taciturn, straight pals, Frankie must supply them with weed, which he obtains from the strangers he meets online for sex. His decision to bring his friends with him to meet one of his gay contacts is partly just a means to an end: he'll pretend to be gay, goes the plan, so that everyone can get high. But it's a choice with multiple layers of ulterior motive: Frankie's sadistic desire to put another gay man at risk of homophobic violence; his masochistic need to unveil his own hidden life and take the violent consequences; and his sexual curiosity, since the whole set-up has a whiff of a potential orgy about it.

The road to a climactic confrontation is a slow and meandering one. "Fireworks are, like, the opposite of romantic," Frankie tells his would-be girlfriend Simone at the start of the film, and director Eliza Hittman and cinematographer Hélène Louvart would seem to share his disdain for showy spectacle: shot on 16mm, the film is as low-key and melancholy in its look as in its mood. Its mix of murky, up-close realism and dreamy vagueness is reminiscent of Gus Van Sant's and Larry Clark's detailed, faintly voyeuristic depictions of teen life, as well Matt Porterfield's unvarnished but elegant portraits of urban disaffection.

Less nuanced is the portrayal of Simone, who despite Madeline Weinstein's spirited performance is granted little interiority beyond her slavish desire to have Frankie as her boyfriend. Frankie's friends are also a shadowy collective presence – more muscular, threatening set-dressing than distinct individuals. That the film yokes itself so closely to Frankie's perspective provides a tremendous showcase for Dickinson, and plentiful opportunity to meditate on Frankie's complex motivations; but it also means that other characters tend to lack definition. Performances are fine across the board, however, with Kate Hodge a warm, watchful, sterling presence as Frankie's mother, and Harrison Sheehan particularly touching as Jeremy, the sweet-natured online date who bears some of the brunt of Frankie's self-hatred. And Simone does get to identify a piquant sexual inequality when she observes, in response to a query from Frankie: "Two girls can make out and it's hot; when two guys make out, it's just gay."

What 'gay' means to each of these characters is a fascinating, shadowy element of Hittman's script. "Don't forget to act gay!" one of Frankie's straight friends teases as he heads off to meet a contact, ostensibly just for a drug connection. Forgetting to act straight is, of course, more

of a preoccupation for Frankie. "I don't think of myself as gay..." he loftily tells Jeremy, who gently bats back a reminder: "But you have sex with men." Frankie, we sense, would like to take the pleasure of being gay without having to wear the label; his probing of whether Simone would find it hot to watch two guys make out, and whether his friends would mind being around gay guys if weed were involved, indicates his yearning to change everything without having to change a thing. Only drugs and alcohol take the edge off his private turmoil. When his mother, finding him high as a kite, initiates a conversation in the hope of hearing some deep confession or expression of need, it's Frankie's happiness rather than his pain that comes between them. "I feel so fucking good right now," he tells her, "I just wish I could feel like this all the time." It's a poignant, frustrating reminder of the gaps between parents and kids; between our inner and outer selves; and between short-term pleasure and long-term psychological health.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Drew Houpt
Brad Becker-Parton
Paul Mezey
Andrew Goldman
Written by
Eliza Hittman
Cinematographer
Hélène Louvart
Edited by
Scott Cummings
Joe Murphy
Production Designer
Grace Yun
Composer
Nicholas Leone
Sound Mixer
Laura Cunningham
Costume Designer
Olga Mill

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Production Companies
A Cinereach production in association with Animal Kingdom, Secret Engine
Developed in part with support from Cinereach Fellowships
Supported by Sundance Institute Feature Film Program, Sundance Institute Catalyst
Executive Producers
Philipp Engelhorn
Michael Raisler
David Kaplan

Cast
Harris Dickinson
Frankie
Madeline Weinstein
Simone
Kate Hodge
Donna
Neal Huff
Joe
Nicole Flyus
Carla
Frank Hakaj
Nick
David Ivanov
Alexei
Anton Selyaninov
Jesse
Harrison Sheehan
Jeremy
Douglas Everett
Davis
Harry
Gabriel Gans
Eddie
Erik Potempa
Michael, Sheepshead guy
Kris Eivers
Edgar
J. Stephen Brantley
Jersey

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Peccadillo Pictures Ltd

Brooklyn, the present. As his father succumbs to the final phase of terminal cancer, Frankie, a handsome boy in his late teens, begins seeking out male sex partners online. At a beach party he meets and hooks up with Simone, but is unable to perform with her sexually and treats her with disdain. Frankie's father dies. Frankie continues to meet men, but also pursues his relationship with Simone. At a nightclub with her, he recognises one of his male lovers working behind the bar; the man keeps their connection secret, but nevertheless Frankie responds by getting dangerously wasted. His mother fears for his wellbeing, but he rejects her approaches. The friends Frankie spends time with at the beach are looking for a reliable source of marijuana; Frankie offers to provide the drug, intending to source it via one of his online contacts. He brings his friends to an assignation, but the young man, Jeremy, takes fright and leaves. Frankie rearranges the meeting with Jeremy, and has his friends follow, intimidate Jeremy and take away his drugs. Alone afterwards, Frankie appears to contemplate suicide, then watches the firework display on the beach.

Bill Viola The Road to St Paul's

United Kingdom 2017
Director: Gerald 'Gerry' Fox
Certificate PG 84m 23s

Reviewed by Sukhdev Sandhu

Admirers of Bill Viola's video art can often come across as rather defensive. They talk up its spirituality, its utopian underpinnings, its visual and emotional power, the sizeable audiences it attracts around the world. At the same time they pooh-pooh critics and criticality, academics whom they deem too austere, intellectuals who are afraid of feelings and incapable of rapture. According to Chris Townsend, editor of *The Art of Bill Viola* (2004), his work "seeks profundity rather than glib entertainment; and it towers over us, transcendent, when we would seek to control all that we see."

Judging from *Bill Viola: The Road to St Paul's*, an account of two permanent installations commissioned from the artist by the London cathedral, director Gerald Fox shares Townsend's adoration. He started filming back in 2005 for an edition of ITV's *The South Bank Show*, a series with a distinguished track record of public-service broadcasting but one that in its latter years was hobbled by erratic scheduling and declining ratings, and seemed to think the best way to fight back was by offering reverential treatments of middlebrow and celebrity figures. For reasons that are not entirely clear, the installation took much longer than anticipated – to the point that, by the time ITV axed the show in 2010, Viola was still half a decade away from completion.

No one involved in the project seems to have been put out by this delay. Perhaps they were charmed or disarmed by the artist. Emollient, earnest and sporting a tantric-teacher goatee, he's forever delivering the kind of profundities found in Instagram poetry or on the walls of upscale yoga studios. "I'm in a receptive mode now and that's very precious," he announces as he scopes out St Paul's Cathedral. At another point he declares: "Everything, for me, comes from the soul, from the spirit. And that's the origin of it all." Later he reveals: "Beauty is the very profound depth that's in us all."

Viola is far from inarticulate. His writings, some of them collected in *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House* (1995), can be insightful. Presumably the goal here was to have him signify as a profound universalist rather than a white-cube elitist; instead, he sounds like a perfumed parody, an art-hater's idea of an artist – whether it's spouting New Age vapidities ("The Mary piece is about the earth, about fertility, about the feminine principle"), sounding like an e-commerce CEO ("I've never been asked to make something eternal!" he exclaims when Foster & Partners acquires a permanent piece from him) or trading in sub-Hallmark-card pieties ("Yes, it was sad," he says of his dying mother, "but there was a deeper depth in there that went to a place that I would say was beautiful").

On location shoots, Viola interrupts his performers just as they're on the brink of making interesting observations about his work. Happy with a particular take, he squeals: "Yes! That was the best of the best!" It's valuable to see his partner Kira Perov contribute to the shaping and making of his video works. However, footage of the editing process reveals neither aesthetic epiphanies nor fault lines. Coverage of his signature works – among them *Heaven and Earth* (1992) – is too cursory to convey its immersive potency.

Transcendental: Bill Viola's *Mary*

Fox might have included more and sparkier testimonials from Viola's fans. (An academic here sensationally reveals that "Bill Viola's work is animated by – is shaped by – his vision.") He might, as Mark Kidel did in his excellent 2002 film *Bill Viola: The Eye of the Heart*, have explored the artist's anti-war activism or his interest in Eastern mysticism. He might even have asked probing questions about the relevance of video art in contemporary moving-image culture. All of these would have made for a more discursive, less hagiographic film. But Fox's Viola is towering and transcendental – and all the less interesting for it.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Gerald 'Gerry' Fox
Screenwriter
Gerald Fox
Cameramen
Steve Haskett
Simon Fanthorpe
Emilio Della Chiesa
Neal Brown
Roger Grange
Ulli Bonnekamp
Editor
John Street
Music Composer
Nigel Horn
Sound
John Quinn
Percy Urgena
James Goddard
Paolo Centoni
Bob Schuck
John Avery
JC Schlageter
Diego Piotto

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Production Companies
GMF, ITV, Tate Media & Arts Council England present a Foxy Films production
A film by Gerry Fox
Executive Producer
Melvyn Bragg

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Picturehouse Docs

London, 2005. Distinguished American video artist Bill Viola has been commissioned by St Paul's Cathedral to create two permanent moving-image installations. The project – its conceptualisation, filming (some of it in Ojai, California) and editing – involves close collaboration with Viola's wife Kira Perov. Viola discusses some of the spiritual and philosophical forces at play in his art, is shown attending the opening of museum shows devoted to his work, and is present at the unveiling of the St Paul's installation: the four-screen 'Martyrs' (2014) and three-screen 'Mary' (2016).

Boy

New Zealand/USA 2010
Director: Taika Waititi
Certificate 15 87m 45s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Warmly received on the festival circuit back in 2010, this early work by New Zealander Taika Waititi gains its long-delayed UK release on the back of his shift to the budgetary big league with *Thor: Ragnarok* (see page 78). Waititi has secured a solid cult following as both actor and director with the warmly quirky likes of *Eagle vs Shark* (2007), *What We Do in the Shadows* (2014) and *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* (2016). *Boy*, a tale of familial dysfunction set in a Maori community on New Zealand's Bay of Plenty, is an effective showcase for his strengths: sweet verbal and visual humour; a sly awareness of the insecurities and self-aggrandising delusions of youth and masculinity; occasional, skilfully timed gut-punches of emotional directness. If the cutesier elements of *Boy*, which include intermittent hand-drawn animation and a perky, plinky-plonky score, seem a little dated seven years on, its wit feels fresh.

'Boy' is a nickname for Alamein (James Rolleston), who, along with his small brother Rocky (Te Aho Eketone-Whitu), is being brought up by his grandmother. Their mother died giving birth to Rocky, and their father has been away for some time. When we hear Boy declare that his "favourite person is Michael Jackson", it's an indicator that he likes to think the best of people, to the point of self-delusion. So as far as he's concerned, his father is off doing any number of adventurous and heroic things. In truth, he's in prison. Boy has merged the two in his mind: he has visions of his dad dressed as Jackson, solemnly attempting those weirdly beautiful dance moves.

The film is good at honouring both sides of Boy's life – his naive, gilded childhood fantasies and the raw reality in which he lives – and letting us sense for ourselves the sadness that lies unacknowledged in the gap between them. When Waititi lets this hurt, it really does: when little Rocky's request for memories of his late mum calls up Boy's own recollection of the bloodied bed in which she passed away; when Boy's father manages, through recklessness and inattention, to knock down and kill the beloved family goat. Elsewhere, the grimness visited on children by adults is played for laughs, as when a teacher assails his class with increasingly grim questions ("Who here has had nits?" "Who knows what disease this sheep has got?" "Who's heard of the plague?").

Boy wondering: James Rolleston

The film's other boy is another Alamein: the prodigal father of the piece, played by Waititi himself. Since his humour customarily relies a great deal on adults speaking and behaving like children, Waititi finds clear enjoyment both as a writer and performer in Alamein's monstrous immaturity. This is a grown man who wheedles money out of his elderly mother, who remains visibly proud of the swastika he once drew on his bedroom wall and who responds to criticism from his sister-in-law with the playground taunt, "I know you are, I said you are, what am I?" In trying to imitate him, Boy – telling a schoolmate "I'm gonna make you drink a gumboot full of knuckles and sandwiches" – exposes his father's dangerous silliness. And though the general sunniness of the film necessitates a degree of indulgence of Alamein (the final, highly endearing sequence has the whole cast performing a haka styled after Michael Jackson's 'Thriller' video), the suffering involved in being raised by such a figure is no more easily forgotten than Jackson's questionable credentials as a childhood icon.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Ainsley Gardiner
Cliff Curtis
Emanuel Michael
Written by
Taika Waititi
Director of Photography
Adam Clark
Editor
Chris Plummer
Production Design
Shayne Radford

Original Score
Lukasz Buda
Samuel Scott
Conrad Wedde
Sound Mixer
Ken Saville
Costume Design
Amanda Neale

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Production Companies
Whenua Films and The New Zealand Film Production Fund Trust
Unison Films in association with The New Zealand Film Commission, New Zealand On Air, Te Mangai Paho present a film by Taika Waititi
Developed with the assistance of the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program

Cast
James Rolleston
Boy
Te Aho Eketone-Whitu
Rocky
Taika Waititi
Alamein
Moerangi Tihore
Dynasty
Cherilee Martin
Kelly
RickyLee Waipuka-Russell
Chardonnay
Haze Reweti
Dallas
Maakariini Butler
Murray
Rajvinder Eria
Tane
Manihera Rangiuaia
Kingi
Darcy Ray Flavell-Hudson
Holden

Dolby Digital
In Colour and Black & White [1.85:1]

Distributor
Vertigo Films

New Zealand, 1984. Boy and his brother Rocky live with their grandmother and several cousins. Their mother Joanie is dead, their father Alamein in prison. When Alamein unexpectedly returns, ostensibly to see the family but actually to seek money buried after a drug deal long ago, Boy is thrilled; for Rocky, whose birth caused Joanie's death, the reunion is less warm. Boy idolises Alamein, and begins to emulate his drinking, weed-smoking and gangster swagger. Alamein, frustrated by his failure to find the money, eventually reacts violently to Boy, taking his favourite jacket without permission, and the two fight. Boy discovers the remains of the money, which has been eaten by the family's goat, Leaf. Through their involvement in the local drug scene, Alamein and his friends get into a fight; driving home, an overexcited Alamein hits and kills Leaf. Alamein's friends leave. A disappointed Boy confronts Alamein. Contrite, Alamein visits Joanie's grave, where both boys track him down and join him.

Brakes

United Kingdom 2016
Director: Mercedes Grower

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

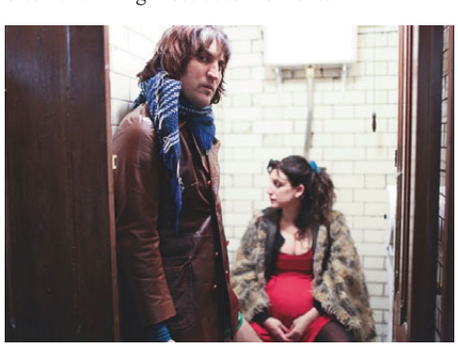
Breaking up is not so much hard to do as virtually inevitable in this seriocomic micro-budget offering, which casts a somewhat sceptical eye on the state of modern romance.

Upfront, the appearance of a caption reading 'Part Two' signals first-time writer-director Mercedes Grower's main structural gambit: while a series of vignettes unfold, we watch each encounter with half a mind on what might have happened between the same couples in the as-yet-unseen 'Part One'. Taking place in and around sundry London locations, including a Soho public loo and the Thames at low tide, the scenes vary from the broadly farcical (Oliver Maltman amusingly scarpering along the aforementioned South Bank 'beach' to escape the attention of a crazed one-night stand) to the rather more bitter and mundane (Paul McGann and Kate Hardie's liaison painfully petering out on a busy overground station platform).

Throughout, though, there's a sense of moments being caught on the hoof, since the dialogue appears to have been improvised by the cast working from the writer-director's predetermined character sketches. There's a gain in immediacy in taking this approach, but perhaps also a certain loss of precision and focus, ultimately leaving us with a film that's arresting enough from one standoff to another, but somewhat amorphous as a whole, given that each of the myriad curdling relationships has a certain equivalence within the overall ensemble.

The performances are variable, with the chemistry between emotionally needy Kerry Fox and her aloof executive partner Roland Gift never quite sparking as it might, and Julia Davis essentially stealing the whole show as a desperate wannabe actress who inveigles herself into the affections of troubled theatre director Peter Wight. Bringing an unpredictable volatility to the proceedings, it's this segment that hits the hardest, illustrating both Davis's fearless comic instincts and the terrifying insecurity lying just beneath her character's pushy exterior. The humour here is a touch edgier than elsewhere; as the action achieves knuckle-chewing levels of embarrassment, we become aware of the deep yearning for acceptance that drives people to make such terrible romantic decisions.

Given the low success rate for the various couplings, it would be easy to write the whole film off as an exercise in miserabilism, yet when we do eventually reach 'Part One' there's an effective tension between the often charming meet-cute moments


Time off in loo: Noel Fielding, Mercedes Grower

now revealed and our forewarned apprehension that things are not likely to end well for those involved. Grower manages to conjure up some frissons – chance moments in a public library, outside a train station or at an ice-skating rink – lending the second half a bittersweet melancholy that's achieved with fairly minimal means. However, any reviewer's recommendation has to come with the caveat that the challenge of piecemeal shoots determined by thinly stretched resources has resulted in a decidedly rough-and-ready technical standard of sound and vision. Some might find it off-putting, but those who value chutzpah and independent spirit in getting a movie on screen by any means necessary will find those qualities well in evidence here.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Kurban Kassam
Mercedes Grower
Written and Devised by
Mercedes Grower
in collaboration with cast
Story
Mercedes Grower
Directors of Photography
Denzil Armor Brown
Gabi Norland
Shiraz Ksaiba
Edited by
Lizzy Dyson
Yasmina Almosawi
Andy Hauge
Bridge Williams
Greg Butler
Mike Hopkins
Tania Reddin
Sound
Maciel Mariusz Miskiewicz
Alex Thomson
Nick Walker
Kacper Ziemiganin
Oliver Fay
Costume
Mercedes Grower
Emma Tornero
Daniel Roch

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Production Companies
A Brakes Film production
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producer
Judy Counihan
Film Extracts
Metropolis (1927)
Nosferatu/ Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens (1922)
Bride of Frankenstein (1935)
Carnival of Souls (1962)
Hollywood on Parade (1933)

Cast

Julian Barratt
Elliot
Seb Cardinal
Karl
Kelly Campbell
Maeve
Juliet Cowan
Slika
Mercedes Grower
Layla
Salena Godden
Yesmin
Kate Hardie
Susan
Martin Hancock
Mark
Siobhan Hewlett
Kate
Paul McGann
Peter
Oliver Maltman
Raymond
John Milroy
Johnny
Steve Oram
John
Daniel Roch
Brian
Peter Wight
Alan
Julia Davis
Livy
Noel Fielding
Daniel
Kerry Fox
Brinie
Jess-Luisa Flynn
Jess
Roland Gift
Rhys

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Bulldog Film Distribution

Part Two: in present-day London, various couples are breaking up. A surprised Raymond flees along the Thames riverbank, pursued by the flamboyant Elliott. During a tense standoff at a railway station, Susan tells Peter she no longer trusts his assertion that life involves risk-taking. Insecure would-be actress Livy comes on to Karl, who has been cast in her director partner Alan's new film; the latter's unexpected arrival prompts his realisation that their relationship is at an end. Slobbish John struggles to maintain a long-distance online relationship with Irish lover Maeve, while pregnant Layla is having trouble with feckless partner Daniel. Businessman Rhys and his partner Brinie have clearly lost their spark.

Part One: we meet the couples as they are falling in love. Alan is seduced during a casting session by Livy's unconventional personality. Maeve berates John in a hotel swimming pool for blocking her lane, only to realise that he's the helpful IT guy she's been emailing regularly. Adjacent seats at the British Library prove the setting for Susan and Peter's liaison, while Raymond's unease upon waking in a Barcelona apartment does not bode well for Elliott's designs on him. At an ice rink, maintenance man Daniel wins skate-hire assistant Layla's affections by giving her a ride on the rink-polishing machine.

Félicité

France/Senegal/Belgium/Germany/Lebanon/Gabon/Italy/Democratic Republic of the Congo 2016
Director: Alain Gomis
Certificate 12A 129m 14s

The pursuit of happiness: Véro Tshanda Beya

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

A veneer of Europeanness overlays French-Senegalese director Alain Gomis's fourth feature, winner of this year's Grand Jury Prize at Berlin. Following a single mother through the slums of Kinshasa, *Félicité* marries elements of both the Dardenne brothers' social realism and Paolo Sorrentino's hedonistic surrealism to its hot and dusty African setting. An amateur choral interpretation of Arvo Pärt's neoclassical piece 'My Heart's in the Highlands' (also on the soundtrack of Sorrentino's *The Great Beauty*) plays alongside the mashed-up 'Congotronics' of native outfit the Kasai Allstars. The German poet Novalis's 'Hymns to the Night' appears over dream images of okapi.

Félicité herself was originally called Kapiya. Her parents renamed her for the French word for happiness after she recovered unexpectedly from childhood illness. But an aura of the uncanny clings to this woman who has 'risen from the dead': in the eyes of the community, Félicité isn't quite right. She is too independent, too proud. She works as a singer in bars and

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Arnaud Dommerc
Alain Gomis
Oumar Sall
Screenplay
Alain Gomis
With the collaboration of:
Olivier Lousteau
Delphine Zingg
Director of Photography
Céline Bozon
Film Editors
Fabrice Rouaud
Alain Gomis
Art Director
Oumar Sall
Sound Recordist
Benoit de Clerck

©Andolfi, Granit Films, Cinékap, Need Productions, Katuh Studio, Shortcut Films

Production Companies
With the participation of L'aide aux cinémas du monde, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Ministère des Affaires étrangères et du Développement international, Institut Français
With the special participation of FOPICA - Fonds de promotion de l'industrie cinematographique et audiovisuelle du Sénégal, Centre Gabonais de la Cinématographie, TV5 Monde, Canal+ Afrique
With the support of Tax-Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral Belge, Fonds Image de la Francophonie, World Cinema Fund, Final Cut in Venice Workshop, Région Île-de-France
Andolfi/Granit Films & Cinékap presents
In co-production with Need Productions/ Fixer Congo/ Katuh Studio/ Shortcut Films
A film directed by Alain Gomis
With the support of Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée
Screenwriting assistance from Région Normandie, in partnership with the CNC and in collaboration with Maison de l'Image Basse-Normandie
With the special support of FOPICA - Fonds de promotion de l'industrie cinematographique et audiovisuelle du Sénégal and Bureau du Cinéma Gabonais
Supported by Bread-for-the-world-Protestant Development Service
Audience Design Fund - TorinoFilmLab
With the support of Creative Europe - MEDIA Programme of the European Union

Cast

Tshanda Beya
Félicité
Papi Mpaka
Tabu
Gaetan Claudia
Samo
Le Kasaï Allstars
themselves, the band

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
MUBI

Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, the present. Félicité is a single mother who works as a singer in bars and nightclubs. When her teenage son Samo is seriously hurt (apparently in a motorcycle accident), Félicité has to find a million Congolese francs to pay the hospital for an operation to save his leg. Her savings won't cover the cost, so she calls in debts from employers, borrows from her bandmates and begs hostile family members, her ex-husband and a local mob boss for the remainder. But a fellow hospital visitor steals some of Félicité's money, and she must use some more to bribe the policemen who strong-arm her employers into paying up. Still short, she asks the hospital if she can make a down payment, but it is too late – while she has been away, Samo's leg has been amputated. Stunned, Félicité collapses.

Sometime later, Félicité brings Samo home from hospital. She is helped by Tabu, a drunk and womanising handyman who frequents one of the bars where she sings and has recently been helping to mend her broken fridge. Tabu is enamoured of Félicité but unwilling to change his ways; Félicité is wary and guards her independence fiercely. As Tabu helps to care for Samo, a relationship slowly begins to form between them. At the film's end, it seems that Tabu, Samo and Félicité may yet find happiness.

clubs, having left her husband to raise her son Samo alone, and she asserts her aloneness fiercely, asking nothing from anyone.

The film opens with a close-up of Congolese singer-turned-actress Véro Tshanda Beya's face, its planes carved as if from stone, its eyes hooded, watchful. One character compares it to "an armoured car". At times, Félicité seems doped-up, bovine. But at others, her calm surface ruptures and a torrent of rage pours forth. When she sings, it's as if she is possessed.

Whatever equilibrium Félicité has established is rocked when teenager Samo is hospitalised with a serious leg injury following what the nurses tell her was a motorcycle accident. It's not clear whose motorcycle Samo was riding, and indeed a later, seemingly unmotivated incident in which two thieves are beaten half to death suggests there may be more to the story. Samo is silent, unresponsive: shocked, perhaps, or shamed. Félicité, suddenly alive with panic, must race against the clock to raise the money (a million Congolese francs, or $600) for an urgent operation.

French DP Céline Bozon's camera follows her through Kinshasa as she calls on colleagues, friends and family members for help. Few are willing to give, many are hostile; there is nothing to spare in this chaotic, corrupt city. Some suggest that Samo's fate is punishment for Félicité's arrogance ("You wanted to be a strong woman, you puffed out your chest, look at you now," her ex-husband sneers). Yet Félicité is relentless. In the film's standout scene she breaks into the home of a local mob boss and demands money from him. Her righteous endurance in the face of the bloody beating his henchman doles out is almost superhuman.

She gets what she wants – but she is too late. Samo's leg is amputated and the film switches gear from an anxiety-fuelled quest that comments – albeit obliquely – on the dog-eat-dog nature of life of Kinshasa, to a fragmentary love story between Félicité and local mechanic Tabu (Papi Mpaka). Tabu first appears as one blurred face among many at the bar where Félicité sings, another voice amid the lewd, leery chatter. He is a womaniser and a drunk and it seems that any relationship the pair form will be at best tentative. Yet he is also kind, he cares for Samo. It is thanks to him that at the film's end we first see Félicité's radiant smile. He brings poetry and humour to the film.

In its later stages, strange sonic overlaps, slow-motion and double-exposed sequences also seep into the film. Félicité dreams of the wilderness, and we see her wandering the empty scrublands and jungles barefoot at night, or suspended underwater. This latter image calls to mind similar shots of Beyoncé Knowles in *Lemonade*, another musical film that foregrounds the suffering and strength of black women, mothers in particular. But while *Lemonade* is a fever dream, *Félicité*'s first half exhausts its energies. Its second, slower half has the feel of bone-tiredness: the world seems surreal, half-submerged. With Tabu's help, it is all Félicité can do to keep putting one foot in front of the other. Gomis's film ploughs on, like its heroine, dogged but flagging. It is not perfect, but it is very good.

Ferrari Race to Immortality

United Kingdom 2017
Director: Daryl Goodrich
Certificate 15 91m 22s

Reviewed by Michael Hale

Formula One, the pinnacle of motorsport since the inaugural World Championship in 1950, is currently on a downward trajectory. Despite having served as a successful prototype for the now widely adopted model of sporting contest as televised global entertainment product, it lost a third of its total viewership between 2008 and 2016. A switch to pay-to-view channels and the hegemony of a small number of wealthy teams are undoubtedly factors, but for many the reduction in wheel-to-wheel racing, the thrilling lifeblood of the sport, has been decisive.

Against this background, it is perhaps a prescient moment for *Ferrari: Race to Immortality*, Daryl Goodrich's documentary covering five years from the sport's 1950s golden age, to reach the screen. The iconic Ferrari Scuderia team founded by the patriarchal, verging-on-Godfather-like Enzo Ferrari (subject of an upcoming Michael Mann biopic) takes centre stage, with particular emphasis on its two British drivers, Peter Collins and Mike Hawthorn.

The scene depicted and described in a frenetic pre-credits sequence could serve as an effective antithesis to present-day Formula One. This is a world where gains from engineering innovation tend to the vast rather than the marginal, sporting codes and friendships are upheld and racing dramas unfold. A tone of unbridled nostalgia is established and maintained throughout.

Beginning in 1955 and structured into chapters dealing with each year's racing season, the film lionises Hawthorn and Collins for their exploits on the track and their glamorous lifestyles off it. Goodrich has obviously cast a wide net for footage – among the many highlights are priests taking a pre-race stroll along the pit lane and hair-raising on-car footage from a mountainous road race. It is shame, though, that the film generally eschews longer shots, and places an almost constant and occasionally repetitive voiceover to the fore. The cast of characters providing commentary is dominated by journalists, with only a sprinkling of insightful primary participants headed by Louise King (wife to Collins), Jean Ireland (fiancée to Hawthorn) and racing driver Tony Brooks.

The stakes were sky high for racing drivers in the 1950s; some 15 men died driving Formula One cars during the decade. Early on in the film, the consequences of this level of risk are effectively demonstrated by shots of drivers being thrown through the air after collisions; as the seasons go by, Collins, Hawthorn and three colleagues – Alfonso de Portago, Eugenio Castellotti and Luigi Musso – all perish. The two Englishmen are the last to fall, and when Collins suffers fatal injuries at the undulating Nürburgring circuit in 1958, his close friend Hawthorn is watching from the next car. Goodrich wisely makes the most of a distraught Hawthorn – who was to die a few months later while racing informally on public roads – talking on camera about the incident, a rare instance of one of the principal characters of the film telling the story.

Women are present only as the wives or girlfriends of the drivers, which is very likely a true reflection of motor racing at the time. However, given this lack of agency it seems problematic to portray the world shown as a halcyon time and place in all regards bar safety. Additionally, the tendency of the journalists to enthuse about their heroes' romantic interests is overindulged on the voiceover. King and Ireland are treated respectfully, but Musso's girlfriend Fiamma Breschi is described in purely physical terms.

There are discrepancies in approach elsewhere, with Goodrich giving screen time to Musso's rumoured gambling debts while maintaining a strictly hagiographic tenor for Collins and Hawthorn. The film's considerable emotional punch is undermined by this lack of rigour, and things have clearly gone too far when one contributor claims the drivers would be the first men "over the top in a trench". This misguided equivalence is conspicuously inappropriate (Collins reportedly avoided National Service by relocating to Monaco) and indicative of a methodology prioritising glorification over nuance and insight.

Motor superior: *Ferrari: Race to Immortality*

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Julia Taylor-Stanley
Producers
Kevin Loader
Maggie Monteith
Sam Tromans
Based on the book
Mon Ami Mate
by Chris Nixon
Director of Photography
David Meadows
Editor
Paul Trewartha
Production Designer
Francisco Rodriguez-Weil
Composers
Jerry Lane
Andrew Lancaster

Sound Recordists
Grant Lawson
Charles Welsfield
Renato Ferrari
Kyle Martyn-Clark
Costume Designer
Francisco Rodriguez-Weil

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Production Companies
Universal Pictures presents in association with Dignity Film Finance, Lip Sync, Head Gear Films and Metrol Technology an Artemis Films and Dimson Films production
Developed in association with Goldfinch Films and Start Point Productions
Executive Producers
Phil Hunt
Compton Ross
Chris Reed
Phil Rymer
Norman Merry
Peter Hampden

In Colour

Distributor
Munro Film Services

A documentary looking at the Ferrari Scuderia Formula One racing team between 1955 and 1959, focusing on its British drivers Mike Hawthorn and Peter Collins. Under the direction of founder Enzo Ferrari, the team loses drivers Alfonso de Portago and Eugenio Castellotti in 1957, followed by Luigi Musso and Collins in 1958. Hawthorn goes on to win the 1958 World Championship but dies in a road accident months later.

Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool

Director: Paul McGuigan
Certificate 15 105m 29s

See Feature on page 40

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

The Gloria Grahame observed in the opening montage of *Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool* is one captured in close-up fragments, a couple of them – the impishly arched eyebrow, the combative pout – burned indelibly into the fabric of many a hothouse *noir* of the 1940s and 1950s, from *Crossfire* and *Sudden Fear* to *The Big Heat* and *Naked Alibi*. As the star readies herself for an imminent performance, she pauses over a jewelled compact inscribed 'With love, from Bogie' – a memento from the shooting of Nicholas Ray's *In a Lonely Place*. It's something of a jolt when a title card announces that we're not on the RKO or Columbia backlot, but in a regional theatre in Lancaster at the tail end of the 1970s.

Drawn from Peter Turner's 1986 memoir, Paul McGuigan's handsomely mounted film largely avoids the mundane pitfalls of the intimate celebrity biopic, making imaginative play with space and artifice to depict the brief but profound affair between Grahame (Annette Bening) and Turner (Jamie Bell), 30 years her junior. As with 2011's superficially similar *My Week with Marilyn*, a tabloid-friendly Hollywood star working in England forms a close bond with a younger nobody. But Matt Greenhalgh's deft screenplay – his fourth to portray real-life figures following on from Ian Curtis (*Control*, 2007), John Lennon (*Nowhere Boy*, 2009) and Paul Raymond (*The Look of Love*, 2013) – mines compelling material, exploring the contrasting worlds the film's lovers have come from and the one they latterly find themselves in together.

Old Hollywood meets working-class Liverpool in the thick of Thatcherism – yet the unlikely couple first become acquainted in a boarding house in London's Primrose Hill. Turner, an aspiring actor, spies Grahame conducting vocal warm-ups; the landlady later confirms the star's identity ("A big name in black-and-white films. Not doing too well in colour"). Grahame's trinket-strewn room, with its giant peacock sitting atop the dresser, is just one of the highlights of Eve Stewart's dense production design, which also incorporates a remarkable array of baroque wallpaper.

One boogie to the Bee Gees later and a friendship has developed between Grahame and Turner, eventually becoming a romance. It's not without hiccups – when Grahame expresses her desire to play Juliet for the RSC, Turner incurs her wrath by guilelessly responding, "Don't you mean the nurse?" However, little else fazes the star, certainly not a screening of *Alien*, which has her chortling in delight at John Hurt's chest-bursting travails while Turner cowers in her lap. The Turner family give their cautious blessing to the relationship. Sitting in a pub under a noticeboard covered with union flyers, Peter's father declares: "We saw all her films, you know, your mam and me." When he goes on to list the titles, Peter, as if detecting something troubled and rootless in Grahame, solemnly adds one more: "*In a Lonely Place*."

McGuigan and his DP Urszula Pontikos pay direct homage to the latter picture when Turner accompanies Grahame to her beach shack in Malibu. The drive along the coastal highway that Grahame and Bogart take in Ray's 1950 film is replicated, back projection and all; the effect is one of travelling back in time, of a retreat into make-believe, temporarily free of real-world consequences. Meanwhile, a deliriously artificial sunset that seems plucked from one of Guy Maddin's retro phantasmagorias is more reminiscent of the voluptuous Todd-AO maximalism of the Grahame-starring *Oklahoma!* (1955). The illusion is spoilt over a fractious dinner with Gloria's mother (Vanessa Redgrave), as elder sister Joy (Frances Barber) – noting Peter's age – spitefully dredges up the more salacious episodes from Gloria's past, including her notorious seduction of Ray's teenage son.

The affair begins to fray following a short-lived relocation to New York, when Grahame learns that the cancer she had beaten years before has returned, and is this time inoperable. She withholds the diagnosis from the increasingly insecure Turner, leading to a break-up scene that's shrewdly replayed from dual perspectives. The pair reconnect when the ailing Grahame, strenuously resisting medical treatment, opts to stay at the Turner family home, this third act being perhaps the film's most conventional, though never maudlin, section.

Bening is pitch-perfect as the singular star, expertly approximating her vocal inflections and forthright mannerisms – that insouciant, amused gaze, which could turn with the curl of a lip into a fierce glower – without entering into the realm of caricature. Bell is also terrific, his charged, sinuous performance lending Turner affecting shades of vulnerability and inner turmoil. There's fine support, too, from Julie Walters and Kenneth Cranham as Peter's sympathetic parents, and Stephen Graham as Peter's hard-headed, plain-speaking older brother.

Beyond this impressive ensemble playing, what elevates the film above more routine biopic fodder is its adroit marriage of formal and thematic elements. The canny fusing of kitchen sink and dreamy opulence is sustained to the last: as Grahame departs England for the final time, the damp Liverpool night behind her head is abruptly transformed into a gauzy rush of celluloid.

The imitation Grahame: Jamie Bell, Annette Bening

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Barbara Broccoli
Colin Vaines
Screenplay
Matt Greenhalgh
Based on the book by Peter Turner
Director of Photography
Urszula Pontikos
Editor
Nick Emerson
Production Designer
Eve Stewart
Music
J. Ralph
Supervising Sound Editor
Paul Davies
Costume Designer
Jany Temime

Production Companies
IM Global presents in association with Lionsgate an Eon Productions film in association with Synchronistic Pictures
A Paul McGuigan film
Executive Producers
Stuart Ford
Zygi Kamasa
Paul McGuigan
Michael G. Wilson

Cast

Annette Bening
Gloria Grahame
Jamie Bell
Peter Turner
Julie Walters
Bella Turner
Kenneth Cranham
Joe Turner
Vanessa Redgrave
Jean McDougall (Jean Grahame)
Stephen Graham
Joe Turner Jr
Frances Barber
Joy
Leanne Best
Eileen
Jodie McNee
Jessie
Joanna Brookes
Didi

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

London, 1979. Peter Turner, a budding actor from Liverpool, befriends Hollywood actress Gloria Grahame while both are lodging at the same Primrose Hill guesthouse. Grahame, now in her fifties, has travelled to England to appear in a small stage production. Their relationship quickly becomes romantic, and is cautiously supported by Peter's parents. Peter takes a trip with Gloria to California, where a family dinner turns ugly after Gloria's sister brings up details of her sibling's scandalous personal life. Peter and Gloria relocate to New York. Gloria is diagnosed with terminal cancer, but chooses not to tell Peter. Made insecure by Gloria's distant attitude, Peter returns home to take a role in a play.

In 1981, Peter receives word that Gloria has collapsed while performing in Lancaster. Refusing medical treatment, she chooses to stay at Peter's family home. At the theatre where he performs, Peter arranges for Gloria to recite lines as Shakespeare's Juliet, a part she has always longed to play. When Gloria's condition worsens, Peter reluctantly accepts her returning to the US with her family.

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CURZON
ARTIFICIAL EYE

Fireworks

Directors: Simbo Akiyuki, Takeuchi Nobuyuki
Certificate 12A 89m 57s

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

Japanese animated films that have cinema releases in Britain tend to be above-average examples of their niche. This year, though, has seen an exceptionally high number of anime films released on big screens in Britain, and *Fireworks* is close to a routine schedule-filler. It's a romcom with a *Groundhog Day* fantasy device, giving two teenagers a series of magic second chances as they try to run away together. Unfortunately, most viewers will spend most of *Fireworks* thinking of better films that have played with the same ideas.

The slight, whimsical story could have filled a half-hour *Twilight Zone*, and was based on a 45-minute Japanese TV drama. Norimichi is a schoolboy with a crush on a classmate, Nazuna. She challenges him to a swimming race in the school pool, offering to date him if he wins. In the first iteration of the story, Norimichi loses the race, but a tiny magic ball lets him reset events and try again. Each reset takes him to a different version of the world, further and further from his 'reality'. The last scenes turn the youngsters' hometown into a dream realm of glass and water, where they see myriad outcomes play out together.

But *Fireworks* takes the wrong viewpoint. It would have been more interesting from the girl's perspective (or else flipping between the girl's and the boy's, like last year's anime *Your Name*). Nazuna resents her new stepfather; she's also inspired by her mother, who ran away to have a relationship with Nazuna's (deceased) biological father. Nazuna is plainly motivated by the idea of elopement more than any feelings for the boy she's with. A 'second chance' story critiquing her decisions could have been interesting and insightful, giving the narrative a point that's lacking in *Fireworks* as it stands.

Instead, Nazuna is framed through the boy Norimichi's eyes, with the casual teen sexualising that's standard in anime. She lounges by the pool in her swimsuit, and coquettishly invites Norimichi to flick a dragonfly from her face;

A change of teen: *Fireworks*

there are also repeated scenes of her changing clothes. This compares poorly with one of *Fireworks*' obvious anime precedents: Hosoda Mamoru's *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time* (2006), which focused on a hugely engaging schoolgirl heroine whose story was similar but had far more charm and humour.

Fireworks is superficially attractive, aiming for a lambent, yearning atmosphere with blue sky and sea and the repeated motif of a summer fireworks festival (though 2016's anime *A Silent Voice* used summer fireworks to more shockingly lyrical effect, as the background to a suicide attempt). There are moments of synthetic, very clumsy animation from the first scenes onwards, while one of the last fantasy images – a coastal train that suddenly heads into the sea – seems cloned from *Spirited Away* (2001). There are visual quirks, such as high-speed cutting between eyes and faces at moments of teen tension, and one background that transforms into a simplified illustration when the boy resets time, but these touches add up to little.

The film is from the Shaft studio, which could have been expected to make something special. In the past decade, Shaft has produced some of the most ornate, artful and disquieting titles in anime, often for TV. The studio's output includes the fiendishly brilliant *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*, which starts like a cute children's series and ends like *Cabin in the Woods*; the 2011 TV series was remade as a film trilogy. Though the 'chief' director of *Fireworks* is Shinbo Akiyuki, Shaft's best-known director, the film is actually directed by Takeuchi Nobuyuki, an animator and storyboarder stepping up for the first time.

One more director linked to *Fireworks* is Iwai Shunji (*All About Lily Chou-Chou*, 2001), who made the 1993 live-action TV film on which *Fireworks* is based. (Though made for television, it was later recut for Japanese cinemas.) The new *Fireworks* isn't the only anime to be spun off from a live-action Iwai film. In 2015, Iwai himself revisited his 2004 film *Hana and Alice* and made a prequel in rotoscoped animation, *The Case of Hana and Alice*. A delightful story of two eccentric girls, Iwai's portrait of adolescence only highlights how weak *Fireworks* is in comparison.

Credits and Synopsis

Chief Director
Simbo Akiyuki
Director
Takeuchi Nobuyuki
Producer
Kawamura Genki
Screenplay
Iwai Shunji
Character Designer
Watanabe Akio
Music
Kosaki Satoru
Sound Director
Tsuruoka Youta

Production Companies
Aniplex, East Japan Marketing & Communications, Inc., Kadokawa, Lawson HMV Entertainment, LINE, SHAFT, TOHO, TOY'S FACTORY Inc. Uchiage Hanabi, Shita kara Miru ka? Yoko kara Miru ka Production Partners

Cast
Miyano Mamoru
Azumi Yusuke
Suda Masaki
Shimada Norimichi
Hirose Suzu
Oikawa Nazuna
Hanazawa Kana
Miura-sensei
Matsu Takako
Nazuna's mother
Toyonaga Toshiyuki
Kazuhiro
Kaji Yuki
Jin
Asanuma Shintaro
Tajima Junichi

In Colour Subtitles

Distributor
National Amusements

Japanese theatrical title
Uchiage Hanabi, Shita kara Miru ka? Yoko kara Miru ka?
Festival title
Fireworks, Should We See It from the Side or the Bottom?

Japan, the present. In a coastal town, schoolboy Norimichi longs to spend a day with his classmate Nazuna, who's about to move away with her parents. Thanks to a tiny magic ball, Nazuna finds that he can reverse time and undo mistakes, and engineers his and Nazuna's escape into a fantasy world.

Flatliners

USA 2017
Director: Niels Arden Oplev
Certificate 15 109m 38s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

How does one even begin to talk about a movie whose idea of thrills is a Mini Cooper speeding around downtown Toronto by night? That ends with a group of survivors raising a glass to a departed friend and doesn't have the decency to throw in a taunting note of laughter from beyond the grave?

To begin with I suppose I should remind you that *Flatliners*, about five medical students taking part in a near-death experiment, is a remake of a 1990 Joel Schumacher vehicle of the same name, which you might be forgiven for not remembering anything about. I watched it probably a dozen times as a pre-adolescent, but had somehow forgotten that it was directed by Schumacher until I looked it up just now. I did, however, have a vague recollection of Kiefer Sutherland being in it, and he's in the new one as well, which should be a treat for *Flatliners* buffs, assuming such a creature exists.

Columbia Pictures, at least, was convinced that they were out there in droves, and so the title was dusted off and put into the hands of Danish director Niels Arden Oplev, whose signature style, if it can be extrapolated from *Flatliners*, could be typified as 'wheezily competent'. The cast is the sort of grab-bag affair that comes together for no logic other than that of haggling agents and – given the presence of Canadians Sutherland, Ellen Page and Nina Dobrev and the Ontario locations – probably the inducement of a sweetheart hook-up from the Commonwealth.

While it's an established fact that there was no pressing need for a rebooted *Flatliners*, this is not necessarily an insuperable burden – disposability can be one of the great liberating factors of pop cinema, something Schumacher recognised in his better moments, most of which are assembled in *The Lost Boys* (1987). Unfortunately, no one involved in the production appears to have been apprised of this. Page remains an entirely lustreless performer; Diego Luna carries out his contractually obligated shirtlessness with a stiff upper lip; Dobrev at least has the one funny line in the movie, a sighed "Isn't it beautiful?" while looking at the most unutterably nondescript portion of the Toronto skyline. It's James Norton who has the best shot at goosing the thing to life, given

Head of the class: Ellen Page

the role of a feckless, arrogant, pussy-hound rich kid who dreams of being a television quack, but this doesn't render up anything beyond weak threesome innuendo. Norton is also at the centre of the lamest set piece in a film full of them, which ends confusingly and abruptly with his being stabbed through the hand by a spectre who apparently leaves it at that, for he shows up in the following scene looking not much worse for wear save for his gauze-swaddled mitt.

The art-direction possibilities of conjuring up physical manifestations of unquiet consciences should at least be the one foolproof element of the original property, but we get nothing more than *Nightmare on Elm Street* dream vistas by the lowest-bidding CGI operation in town. Various haunting scenes in the 'real' world likewise rely on creepy clichés untouched by any indication of flair or care. The almost complete absence of intelligent effort to be found on every level in the film makes one wonder what possible reason such an undertaking could have for existing, other than to invite tragically bored critics to tee off on its title. I will not take the bait.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Laurence Mark
Michael Douglas
Peter Safran
Screenplay
Ben Ripley
Story
Peter Filardi
Director of Photography
Eric Kress
Edited by
Tom Elkins
Production Designer
Niels Sejer
Music
Nathan Barr
Production Mixer
Kelly Wright
Costume Designer
Jenny Gering

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Production Companies
Columbia Pictures presents in association with Cross Creek Pictures a Laurence Mark/Furthur Films/Safran Company production
A film by Niels Arden Oplev
Executive Producers
Michael Bederman
Robert Mitas
David Blackman
Brian Oliver
Hassan Taher

Cast

Ellen Page
Courtney
Diego Luna
Ray
Nina Dobrev
Marlo
James Norton
Jamie
Kiersey Clemons
Sophia
Beau Mirchoff
Brad Mauser
Wendy Raquel Robinson
Sophia's mother
Kiefer Sutherland
Dr Barry Wolfson
Madison Brydges
Tessa
Jacob Soley
Alex
Anna Arden
Alicia
Miguel Anthony
Cyrus Gudgeon
Jenny Raven
Irina Wong

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

North America, present day. Courtney, a medical student who survived a car crash that killed her younger sister eight years ago, recruits the help of classmates Jamie and Sophia in an experiment that entails their stopping her heart, monitoring her postmortem brain activity and then reviving her. In the aftermath of the experiment, during which she experienced exhilarating visions, Courtney has heightened energy and mental acuity. Seeing this, her companions also undergo the near-death treatment, as does fellow classmate Marlo, with intern Ray the only witness who refrains from participating. In time the participants find themselves persecuted by figures from their near-death visions. In each case the visions are manifestations of a troubled conscience: Courtney feels guilt about her sister's death, Jamie about an abandoned conquest, Sophia about a classmate whose reputation she ruined, and Marlo about a patient she killed through misdiagnosis. Bedevilled by her 'ghost', Courtney falls to her death. The survivors decide to make amends to their victims, alive and dead, and in so doing end the hauntings.

The Florida Project

USA 2017
Director: Sean Baker

Motel Babylon: Brooklynn Prince, Bria Vinaite

See Feature on page 26

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Truffaut, master of the child's-eye view, said that his wish was to depict "children's tremendous ability to stand up to life and survive". Something of the same spirit infuses Sean Baker's impressionistic yet clear-eyed drama about a summer's antics and hard times in a rundown Florida motel filled with low-income families.

Head of her own gang of 'little rascals', precocious six-year-old Moonee (Brooklynn Prince) runs wild, largely unsupervised by her loving but rebellious mother Halley (Bria Vinaite). Both transgress cheerfully despite the exasperated interventions of the Magic Castle motel's manager Bobby (Willem Dafoe, bringing a tired, resigned kindness not seen since 1992's *Light Sleeper*). Less mother and child than co-conspirators in reckless fun, Moonee and Halley live for the moment, and on the margins, hawking wholesale perfumes to rich tourists holidaying in the neighbouring Disney resort. These two worlds scrape up against one another sharply. Some of the film's best moments show Moonee and Halley sneaking across the boundary: scamming vast hotel buffet breakfasts, or sharing a single cupcake under a popping sky of resort fireworks.

Baker's films have long been interested in the overlooked – riding shotgun with a Chinese-meal delivery man in *Take Out* (2004), a Ghanaian street hustler in *Prince of Broadway* (2008) and, most famously, transgender sex workers in *Tangerine* (2015). Here it's the hidden world of 'motel kids', where families scrabble to make rent for single rooms and are forced to move out once a month to avoid establishing residency.

Shot in an observational neorealist style but with an eye for the gaudy, sherbet-coloured beauty of the setting, it's a warm, sympathetic piece. Non-judgemental about mothering, it shows the sheer rule-breaking fun of Moonee and co's behaviour, while acknowledging its very real risks. Immersing the viewer in Moonee's view of her own 'magical kingdom' of motel balconies, kitschy strip malls and swampland, the narrative nimbly strings together her child-sized adventures. Like an edgier and unsentimental *Small Change* (1976), the film shows Moonee and her little band busying themselves spitting on cars, yelling insults at a topless OAP sunbather or grifting ice creams from tourists. Baker takes his inspiration here, without incongruity, from Hal Roach's TV series *The Little Rascals*. Yet he's always conscious that unbridled play in public spaces is marked out nowadays as antisocial rather than mischievous. The texture of the children's days is captured in fine, close-up detail – harrumphing at adult chivvying, the delight of rain on skin, finding cows in a field ("I took you on a safari!"). Sliced into it is their gruff guardian Bobby's thankless daily round, dealing with everything from bedbugs to a child predator.

If Baker's 'slow cinema' approach gives a welcome depth, it also makes for an episodic, slightly soggy middle section. In contrast to *Tangerine*'s revenge-plot momentum, it dawdles, albeit absorbingly. So when the story pivots to Halley's spiral into sex work, there's a much needed hit of drama. Especially since, like *Fish Tank* (2009) and *American Honey* (2016), the script (co-written by Baker and long-time collaborator Chris Bergoch) refrains from moralising, concentrating instead on the rushing highs and lows of Halley's jaunts and fights, the sting as her closest friendship collapses rancorously.

Transmitting a rebellious energy into these scenes, first-time actress Vinaite crackles. Yet her raucous, one-note style can't adapt to tender, more nuanced scenes with Moonee. Beside Halley's immature rages, Prince's Moonee conveys a smart-mouthed, take-charge precocity that seems adult beyond her years: "I always know when grown-ups are about to cry," she remarks sagely. Watching her racked with misery at a key point, you're almost surprised to see her vulnerable, out of fixes. Veteran actor Dafoe blends in seamlessly with the sharp naturalism of the film's first-time performers, his

understated Bobby torn between chastising chaotic families and bailing them out.

Around them, Baker and cinematographer Alexis Zabe wrap 35mm widescreen landscapes of considerable beauty, a sudden spread of twilight balcony lights or a melting sunset turning the candy-coloured motel into a hardscrabble wonderland. Even when Moonee's gang accidentally torch an abandoned condo, their play in white wafts of insulation ("Ghost poop!") has a child's delight in everyday enchantments. This may also be what's responsible for the film's single sizeable misjudgement: a late-on swerve into wishful fancy.

Nonetheless, it's the film's sympathetic eye that ensures it doesn't exoticise the family's plight, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* style, or dip into poverty porn. Drunken brawls, pissed-off johns and vicious catfights are simply day-to-day eruptions here, blowing in and out of the motel like the Florida weather. Full of compassion and curiosity about its characters' fragile lives, this memorable drama establishes Baker as among cinema's most original chroniclers of childhood.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Kevin Chinoy
Francesca Silvestri
Andrew Duncan
Alex Saks
Sean Baker
Chris Bergoch
Shih-Ching Tsou
Written by
Sean Baker
Chris Bergoch
Director of Photography
Alexis Zabé
Production Designer
Stephonik Youth
Sound Mixer
Mark Weber
Costume Designer
Fernando A. Rodriguez

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Production Companies
June Pictures presents a Cre Film and Freestyle Picture Company production
A film by Sean Baker
This production participated in The New York State Governor's Office of Motion Picture & Television Development's Post Production Credit Program
With support from Cinereach
Executive Producers
Elayne Schneiderman Schmidt
Darren Dean

Cast
Willem Dafoe
Bobby
Brooklynn Kimberly Prince
Moonee
Bria Vinaite
Hailey
Valeria Cotto
Jancey
Christopher Rivera
Scooty
Caleb Landry Jones
Jack

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Altitude Film Entertainment

Florida, present day. Six-year-old Moonee and her mother Halley live in a motel that is largely occupied by low-income families. Moonee and her friends Jancey and Scooty run wild around the neighbourhood during the summer holidays. Motel manager Bobby acts as their exasperated guardian. He sees off a sexual predator trying to befriend them. When Moonee and Scooty accidentally burn down an abandoned condo, Scooty's mother Ashley falls out with Halley. Halley makes a scene in the diner where Ashley works. Halley and Moonee hang out happily together. Prevented from hawking perfumes to tourists, and after being forced to leave the motel briefly, Halley starts selling sex to men in her room. She keeps Moonee safe in the bathroom. Halley and Moonee sell on theme-park all-access bracelets, stolen from a client. He accuses her of theft. Bobby runs him off, but threatens her with eviction. Halley tries to reconcile with Ashley to borrow rent. She and Ashley have a vicious physical fight. Ashley accuses her of prostitution. Child welfare investigators interview Halley after a tip-off. Halley and Moonee sneak into a hotel to scam one last breakfast. Police officers and child welfare workers come to take Moonee into state care. Moonee gives them the slip and runs to Jancey. The two girls run into the neighbouring theme park, and are lost from sight in the crowd.

Geostorm

USA 2017
Director: Dean Devlin
Certificate 12A 108m 58s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

In the most daring finish of any big-studio science-fiction film, Ted Post's *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1970) tried to one-up the Statue of Liberty twist of *Planet of the Apes* (1968) by having Charlton Heston set off a doomsday device that destroys all life on Earth. Despite repurposed actuality footage, simulations in which red blotches cover the map of the world and much talk of the apocalyptic potential of a geostorm – a global orgy of interconnected disastrous weather events – it's plain from the weedy opening narration, delivered by the prematurely wise little daughter of the hero, that *Geostorm* is not going to go there. Which is a problem – much as audiences might collectively wish for the survival of the planet, when you buy a ticket for a movie like *Geostorm*, we want it to deliver a geostorm. Any number of throwaway cataclysms imperilling extras (an ice tsunami hitting Rio, a heat-ray aimed at Moscow, killer hail in Tokyo, twisters in Mumbai) are no substitute.

The big-screen directorial debut of Dean Devlin, best known as co-writer of Roland Emmerich disaster epics *Independence Day* (1996) and *Godzilla* (1998), *Geostorm* sets out to be straight-faced but silly in almost every department. A global threat is addressed by feuding brothers who must reconcile to save humanity, despite the fact that grouchy Gerard Butler is on the International Space Station and earnest Jim Sturgess is running around Washington DC and Florida dodging lethal weather and hitmen. Opting to make the relationship of these two-dimensional guys the film's spine, Devlin has to hurry through (and cut away from) two workable thriller subgenre arcs until all suspense is frittered away. In space, a hi-tech murder mystery revolves around which member of an international team – commanded by sternly German Alexandra Maria Lara with the hilarious character name 'Ute Fassbinder' – is using backdoors into the system to create freak airlock, spacesuit and death-ray satellite accidents. On the ground, the political conspiracy offers

Bucketing list: Gerard Butler

too few suspects. Someone's using the Dutch Boy satellite grid to eliminate America's enemies and competitors all at once. Is it president Andy Garcia, played almost in the same tone as his 'don't say I'm like the *Jaws* mayor' mayor of New York in *Ghostbusters* (2016), or secretary of state Ed Harris, Sturgess's crusty mentor and the one person he trusts with his brother's crazy theories.

Other soap-opera strands include Sturgess's against-regulations romance with a secret-service agent (Abbie Cornish) and a folksy family fishing story used as a secret code between the brothers. Butler, a likeable leading man who always seems to get stuck with scripts Colin Farrell probably passed on, looks uncomfortable in zero gravity and uttering speech balloon lines. "Aren't you a bit curious to watch the world burn?" asks a villain, only for the hero to snap back, "No, because millions of people are going to die and one of them's my daughter!" Butler's best guilty-pleasure vehicle remains the truly demented *Law Abiding Citizen* (2009), but this trudges along in the debris-strewn wake of his *...Has Fallen* movies – edging him into the category of star whose career needs an internationally mounted rescue mission before his real talent is sucked into a black hole. The SyFy channel has flooded (not to mention stormed and burned up) the airwaves with dirt-cheap 'bad weather' pictures (*Seattle Superstorm, Ice Twisters, The 12 Disasters of Christmas, Snowmageddon*). This vastly more expensive version is only fitfully entertaining even as junk.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
David Ellison
Dean Devlin
Written by
Dean Devlin
Paul Guyot
Director of Photography
Roberto Schaefer
Edited by
Ron Rosen
Chris Lebenzon
John Refoua
Production Designer
Kirk M. Petruccelli
Music
Lorne Balfe
Sound Mixer
Pud Cusack
Costume Designer
Susan Matheson
Visual Effects
Framestore
Double Negative
Method Studios
[Hy*drau"lx]
Soho VFX
Ingenuity Studios
Important Looking Pirates
Zero FX
Scanline VFX
At the Post
Rising Sun Pictures
El Ranchito
Instinctual
Cos FX
Flash Film Works
Stunt Co-ordinators
Charlie Croughwell
Chelsea Bruland

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Production Companies
Warner Bros. Pictures and Skydance presents in association with RatPac-Dune Entertainment a Skydance, Electric Entertainment production
A film by Dean Devlin
Executive Producers
Herbert W. Gains
Marc Roskin
Don Granger

Cast
Gerard Butler
Jake Lawson
Jim Sturgess
Max Larson
Abbie Cornish
Sarah Wilson
Alexandra Maria Lara
Ute Fassbinder
Daniel Wu
Cheng Long
Eugenio Derbez
Al Hernandez
Zazie Beetz
Dana
Talitha Bateman
Hannah
Ed Harris
Leonard Dekkom
Andy Garcia
President Andrew Palma

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

The near future. Following a series of increasingly severe weather events, engineer Jake Lawson commands 'Dutch Boy', an international project to ring the world with weather-control satellites. Provisionally under US control, Dutch Boy is to be handed over to the UN after three years. Despite his scientific genius, Jake is inept at politics and his younger brother Max, a government official, is forced to fire him.

Nearly three years later, Dutch Boy seems to cause disasters in Afghanistan and Hong Kong, and Max recruits Jake to find out why it has become erratic. On the International Space Station, Jake realises that a high-level conspiracy is using Dutch Boy as a weapon. Max suspects US president Palma, the only person with the kill codes for the system, but in fact the mastermind of the scheme is secretary of state Dekkom, who intends to use Dutch Boy to damage the US's enemies and wipe out all in the line of succession to the presidency except himself. Max rescues Palma and passes the codes to Jake, who shuts down Dutch Boy before it causes a global catastrophe.

Good Time

Directors: Josh Safdie, Benny Safdie
Certificate 15 101m 35s

See Feature on page 20

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

Of all the youngish, critically buoyed New York filmmakers to emerge over the past decade, Josh and Benny Safdie are at once the craftiest and the most reckless. They like to get away with things (cf the borderline alarming production circumstances of their 2014 junkie drama *Heaven Knows What*), and their movies are about characters who are similarly driven.

In *Good Time*, Robert Pattinson plays Connie, a low-level hood defined, for better and mostly for worse, by his belief that he can wriggle out of any situation if he gives it a couple of minutes' thought. As a confidence man, he's his own best customer. The queasy, compulsive excitement of the film lies in watching somebody who's not quite as smart as he thinks he is living by his wits – and by the skin of his teeth.

Connie's status as a disruptive force is established and cemented in the very first scene, when he bursts into a therapy session between his developmentally disabled younger brother Nick (played by co-director Benny) and a social worker. Not only does Connie's intrusion cut off the dialogue between Nick and his caregiver when it seems on the verge of a breakthrough, it also up-ends the stable, shot-reverse-shot camerawork describing their exchange. His arrival doesn't just end the session: it rewrites the film's language. Connie is an emissary of the sprawling New York phantasmagoria that lies beyond the office walls, and *Good Time*'s breakneck pace and nervy, uneven rhythms – in terms of camera movement, cutting and the throbbing electronic score by Oneohtrix – are tethered to the actions of its central chaos agent.

Pattinson is tremendous here, achieving a different sort of self-effacement than in his noble supporting role in last year's *The Lost City of Z*. Once again, the performance works as a disappearing act, though the point is less that an attractive movie star has believably disguised himself as a low-level hustler than that he's hit upon subterfuge as a motif for the character. Connie operates at all times under a fog of task-oriented paranoia. The masterstroke of the script (co-written by Josh with Ronald Bronstein, who also worked on the editing) is how it takes a situation that, in almost any other film of this type, would be played for pathos – Connie's desperate attempt to retrieve a confused Nick from police custody after the latter is arrested following a botched heist – and instead strip-mines it for every last iota of moral ambiguity. Brotherly love isn't a higher calling here; it's a trap that closes in on both siblings in different ways.

Nick's incarceration essentially takes him out of the narrative, stranding Connie with what little is left of the stick-up money and stranding us with Connie, who has to rank as one of the most defiantly unlikeable protagonists in recent American cinema. What makes *Good Time* a slightly flummoxing viewing experience is the way the Safdies illustrate this point without insisting on it. Their style is observational, not rhetorical, and the inherent refusal to impose judgement on Connie's actions, which quickly devolve from merely manipulative (convincing his older girlfriend, played by Jennifer Jason Leigh, to max out her credit cards to pay Nick's bail) to truly outrageous (kidnapping an unconscious, badly injured patient from a critical-care ward), coupled with the dynamism of their presentation, creates a certain spaciousness for audience reaction. In the absence of overt ethical annotation, this supremely assured movie becomes a difficult and slippery object; one viewer's enervating nightmare could very well be another's good time.

So: would *Good Time* be improved if it were made clearer that Connie, and his habit of predatorily exploiting the people around him – particularly and most egregiously a series of African-American characters victimised in different ways along the trajectory of his rescue operation – was a 'bad' person? I'd say no, and not only because there are too few American movies that countenance such ambiguity. Connie may be unlikeable, but he's not necessarily unrelatable; the sequence of deep, rocky gaps between his intentions, his actions and their consequences feel truer to life (even to lives far removed from this specific milieu) than any number of more carefully finessed antiheroes. And the sheer multiplicity of ways the Safdies find to comment on the action visually – shooting an extended set piece in a deserted amusement park beneath a mix of neon and black light, or elevating their camera to a despairing bird's-eye view at a fateful, decisive point – all but demolishes accusations of glib irresponsibility. Connie is a hopeless case. But his creators know exactly what they're doing.

Hood rat: Robert Pattinson

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Paris Kasidokostas Latsis
Terry Dougas
Sebastian Bear-McClard
Oscar Boyson
Written by
Ronald Bronstein
Josh Safdie
Director of Photography
Sean Price Williams
Edited by
Ronald Bronstein
Benny Safdie
Production Designer
Sam Lisenco
Sound Mixer
Patrick Southern
Original Score Performed, Produced and Written by
Oneohtrix Point Never
Costume Designers
Miyako Bellizzi
Mordechai Rubinstein
Production Companies
An A24 release
Rhea Films presents
an Elara Picture
Executive Producer
Jean-Luc de Fanti

Cast
Robert Pattinson
Constantine Nikas, 'Connie'
Benny Safdie
Nick Nikas
Buddy Duress
Ray
Taliah Lennice Webster
Crystal
Barkhad Abdi
Dash, park security guard
Jennifer Jason Leigh
Corey Ellman

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Curzon Film World

New York City, present day. Connie needs his brother Nick to help him pull off a bank robbery, and retrieves him from a therapy session to prepare him for the heist. Nick, who is developmentally disabled, goes along with the heist but is caught by the police and sent to Rikers Island jail, where he is badly beaten up. Connie, who has escaped and is holed up with his girlfriend, goes to rescue his brother. He steals Nick away from his hospital room, only to discover that he has abducted the wrong man, a parolee named Ray, who has been disfigured in an accident. Connie and Ray travel from Queens with Crystal, a 16-year-old girl Connie has seduced into helping him; their plan is to retrieve a bottle filled with LSD solution from the amusement park where Ray stashed it before being injured. (Connie intends to sell it and use the money to pay Nick's bail.) In the process, they almost kill the park's night watchman.

Crystal is arrested while Connie and Ray go to the guard's apartment. They argue and threaten each other, and the police arrive early in the morning. Ray falls to his death and Connie is taken into custody. The film ends with Nick, recovered from his beating, in a group therapy session.

Heartstone

Sweden/Iceland/Denamrk 2016
Director: Gudmundur Arnar Gudmundsson

Reviewed by Alex Davidson

The Icelandic landscapes in *Heartstone*, filmed through the lens of Sturla Brandth Grøvlen (*Victoria*, *Rams*) around the Borgarfjördur Eystri fjord, may be stunningly beautiful, but they offer no safe haven for the creatures that live there. Sheep are savaged by dogs, live fish are pulverised by the local boys, and trapped animals chew off their feet to escape the snare. Life isn't much easier for the people, though Gudmundur Arnar Gudmundsson's coming-of-age tale offers some optimism to counteract the bleakness.

Heartstone is at its best when conveying the frustrations of living in a very small community, where everyone knows everyone else's business. A harrowing act of violence near the end of the film has become village gossip, and the subject of vicious mockery, within 24 hours of its occurrence.

Teenage best friends Thór (Baldur Einarsson) and Kristján (Blær Hinriksson) are particularly vulnerable – in such an environment, adolescence and its inevitable humiliations are unbearable. Thór's fragile dignity is frequently lost because of his bullying sisters, who throw him naked out of the house and deliberately walk in on him masturbating. Short and baby-faced, Thór trails behind his peers in the race for maturity, even resorting to fashioning a small wig of pubic hair from the strands left on a brush. Kristján, meanwhile, begins to realise that he has romantic feelings for his friend. The Sugarcubes' unnerving 'Birthday' plays in the background near the start of the film, capturing the constant anxiety of the teenagers' lives.

Baldur Einarsson, Blaer Hinriksson

Heartstone's use of Iceland's unique terrain, with stark cliff edges and looming volcanoes, adds a uniquely unsettling intensity to the boys' story. Adolescence is another planet, after all. Water is a metaphor throughout, but for much of the film's length it contaminates rather than purifies. The rain compounds misery and hastens rot; the lake is a void in which to silently scream. Only in the closing seconds does water serve as a chance for rebirth. *Heartstone*, which won the Queer Lion at the 2016 Venice Film Festival, makes for an interesting comparison with another recent gay-themed Icelandic drama – Erlingur Thoroddsen's psychological horror *Rift* (2017), in which two gay men are haunted by traumas from their past. That, too, made excellent use of the country's lava fields, a sinister terrain which nearly claimed the life of one of the men in their childhood and continues to add to their alienation.

Children are the focus of Gudmundsson's earlier short films, and the director coaxes excellent performances from the two young lead actors here. Einarsson conveys the impotent fury of a boy being left behind, and Hinriksson captures the vulnerability of someone who knows that, should he reveal his sexuality and receive a negative reaction, there is no going back. A key moment, when he acts on impulse and, instantly regretting it, unconvincingly mumbles that "it was just a joke", is particularly affecting. While the woes of boyhood are frequently a source of humour in films, *Heartstone* is a rare, very moving drama that takes the challenges of male adolescence seriously.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Anton Máni Svansson
Lise Orheim Stender
Jesper Morthorst
Gudmundur Arnar Gudmundsson
Screenplay
Gudmundur Arnar Gudmundsson
Cinematographer
Sturla Brandth Grøvlen
Editors
Anne Østerud
Janus Billeskov Jansen
Production Designer
Hulda Helgadóttir
Music
Kristian Selin Eidnes Andersen
Sound Design
Peter Schultz
Costume Designer
Helga Rós V. Hannam

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Production Companies
SF Studios Production & Join Motion Pictures present
With support from Kvikmyndamidstöd Islands, Det Danske Filminstitut, Eurimages, Atvinnuvega- Og Nysköpunarráduneyti Islands, TV 2 Danmark/TV 2 Fiktion
In collaboration with RÚV, CosmoTone
A film by Gudmundur Arnar Gudmundsson
Produced by SF Studios Production, Join Motion Pictures
In collaboration with RÚV, CosmoTone
This film also received support from Cannes Cinéfondation through EAVE funded by the MEDIA EU Programme
Executive Producers
Lars Bjørn Hansen
Lars Bredo Rahbek

Cast
Baldur Einarsson Thór
Blær Hinriksson Kristján
Diljá Valsdóttir Beta
Katla Njálsdóttir Hanna
Jónína Thórdís Karlsdóttir Rakel
Rán Ragnarsdóttir Hafdis
Nína Dögg Filippusdóttir Hulda, Thór's mother
Sveinn Ólafur Gunnarsson Sigurdur, Kristján's father
Nanna Kristín Magnúsdóttir Thórdís, Kristján's mother
Søren Malling Sven
Gunnar Jónsson Asgeir
Daniel Hans Erlendsson Haukur
Theodór Pálsson Mangi
Sveinn Sigurbjörnsson Gudjón

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Matchbox Films

Rural Iceland, the present. Young teenagers Thór and Kristján are best friends. The boys are often targets of the neighbourhood bully, Ginger. Kristján's father is a violent drunk who beats up a gay man in a pub, forcing the latter to leave the village. Two girls – Beta and Hanna – are attracted to Thór and Kristján respectively. Sven, a farmer, attempts to woo Thór's mother, giving the boy a gemstone to pass on to her. Thór gives it to Beta instead. One night, when Sven is away, the boys take the farmer's horses and camp out in the countryside with Beta and Hanna. The next morning, Kristján's father violently confronts his son, humiliating him in front of his friends.

While the boys are working at the farm, Kristján suddenly kisses Thór, to the latter's revulsion. When Kristján's father takes the boys to a cliff edge to steal gull eggs, an accident with the abseiling rope nearly kills Thór. Beta unsuccessfully tries to initiate sex with Thór. Following a conversation with Thór, who tells him to stop being 'weird', Kristján, consumed with self-hatred, tries to kill himself. He is sent to Reykjavik for medical treatment. Beta breaks up with Thór, returning the gemstone. When Ginger mocks Kristján's suicide attempt and insults Beta, Thór punches him. Thór later hears that Kristján's parents are getting a divorce, and that his friend will be moving to Reykjavik permanently. With Beta's help, Thór visits Kristján, and the two boys start to heal their friendship.

Jane

USA 2017
Director: Brett Morgen

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

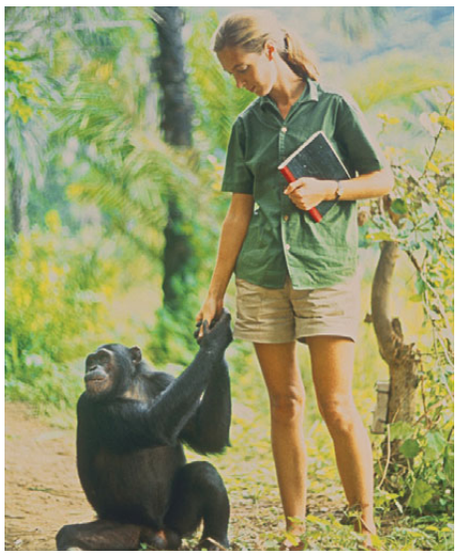
Here's a salutary reminder that in an era when chimpanzees regularly featured in circuses and Tarzan films, the primates themselves had never been studied in their natural habitat. As late as 1960, there'd been no significant survey of the natural behaviours of our closest cousins.

This biographical documentary about world-renowned primatologist and conservation campaigner Jane Goodall reveals that she was initially dispatched to a remote corner of what was then Tanganyika to observe the chimps, with the avowed purpose of augmenting our knowledge of early man. It was revered Kenyan paleoanthropologist Louis Leakey, a significant figure in the tracing of mankind's African roots, who believed that unqualified but mustard-keen Goodall, untouched by academic prejudices or preconceptions, would have the patience and commitment to produce a worthwhile study of this elusive species. Goodall's discovery that the chimps used tools – stripping the leaves from tree shoots and poking the stalks into termite mounds to extricate the juicy insect snacks – would recalibrate our definition of mankind as the only mammal capable of conceiving and utilising implements in this way.

It took visual evidence to convince the world – and indeed to make this respectful movie portrait by documentarist Brett Morgen possible. In 1962, *National Geographic*, part funder of Goodall's Gombe base, sent wildlife cameraman Hugo van Lawick to record her activities, and it's his 16mm footage that is the real prize here. The slightly soft quality of the images and a vintage lit-from-within look to the skin tones give this archive material a dreamlike feel that's somehow realer than real. It brings what can only be described as a sense of wonder to the interpolated footage, which features frolicking chimps, their cheeky acts of thievery and the mums' solicitous care of their young, as well as increasingly attentive coverage of Goodall herself (framing the khaki-clad English naturalist so lovingly it's no surprise to learn that cameraman and subject soon became man and wife). Morgen takes a risky decision to set off this footage with a new score by Philip Glass, very much in his latterday luxuriant neo-Brucknerian orchestral manner, which could possibly have overwhelmed everything else, yet effectively serves the images' sense of awe about the natural world.

Goodall herself, also caught in a framing interview that shows her today as a sharp and sprightly octogenarian, admits a strong sense of spiritual awakening accompanying her realisation of the kinship between man and primate – and when we see the amusing and affecting footage of a baby chimp haltingly toddling along a canvas awning, we can certainly see where she's coming from. While the film's undoubted emotional impact helps to promote Goodall's continuing environmental campaigning, it also avoids any airbrushed Disneyfication of its animal subject matter, refusing to shy away from the nitty-gritty of mating habits, or the horrifying internecine violence that marks a deadly power struggle within the Gombe chimp community.

That said, when the van Lawick footage



Simian to watch over me: Jane Goodall

dries up (his increasing focus on the Serengeti essentially caused the marriage to disintegrate), the film does rather fall away, offering a fairly cursory précis of Dame Jane Goodall's subsequent storied career trajectory – while also steering clear of more recent academic criticism of the overly anthropomorphic aspects of her key 1960s studies. Overall, there's certainly a bigger, wider story to tell, but in its first hour at least this is an often spellbinding experience, suggesting that charismatic wild creatures, gorgeous vintage film stock and Philip Glass on great form make a seriously irresistible combination.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Brett Morgen
Bryan Burk
Tony Gerber
James Smith
Written by
Brett Morgen
Based on the writings of Jane Goodall
Director of Photography
Ellen Kuras
Edited by
Joe Beshenkovsky
Music
Philip Glass

Supervising Sound Editor
Warren Shaw

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Production Companies
National Geographic Documentary Films presents a National Geographic Studios presentation of
In association with Public Road Productions
A film by Brett Morgen
Executive Producers
Tim Pastore
Jeff Hasler

narration by
Jane Goodall

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof

A biographical documentary focusing on British-born primatologist and campaigner Jane Goodall, drawing on 16mm footage captured in the early 1960s by the wildlife photographer Hugo van Lawick. Goodall, now in her eighties, recalls an English middle-class childhood marked by dreams of visiting Africa and working with animals. Though lacking academic qualifications, in 1960 she was assigned by palaeontologist Louis Leakey to study wild chimpanzees at Gombe in Tanzania, to further the understanding of early man. Through close observation, Goodall made milestone discoveries, including the chimps' use of tools and their emotional bond with their offspring. The arrival of Lawick, on assignment from 'National Geographic', brought a vivid filmed record. Lawick and Goodall married in 1964, and had a son. Although the union didn't last after Lawick's work took him to the Serengeti, Goodall's research has been crucial in redefining our notion of humanity.

Kaleidoscope

United Kingdom/USA 2016
Director: Rupert Jones
Certificate 15 99m 11s

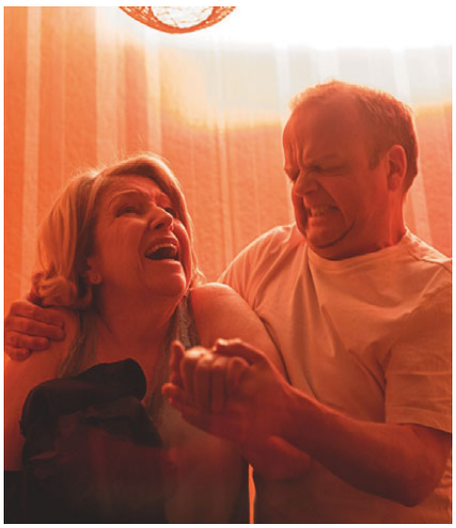
Reviewed by Samuel Wigley

Kaleidoscope was the title of one of Alfred Hitchcock's most tantalising abortive projects: an Antonioni-inspired thriller about a serial-killing bodybuilder. The plot of Rupert Jones's directorial debut of the same name bears no relation, yet the influence of the master of suspense is everywhere in this low-budget psychological thriller, set almost entirely within a flat on a London council estate.

Toby Jones, the director's brother, plays timid loner Carl Woods, a former convict attempting to start life afresh. In the opening scene, he groggily wakes on his sofa, finds lipstick stains on his glassware and has a nightmarish recollection of strangling his internet date the night before. All is not exactly as it seems, though, as *Kaleidoscope* flashes elliptically between the events of the fateful date (Carl's first in 15 years) and the guilt of the following morning, when the arrival of his dominating mother (Anne Reid) further clouds Carl's confused mind.

With books lying around with titles such as *In Two Minds* and repeated shots of kaleidoscope-like refraction, it's not difficult to work out where Jones's debut is heading. Clues to this Freudian stew are hidden in plain sight, from the pointed name of the nightclub where the date is arranged (Lust) to the recurring motif of the block's spiralling stairwell – part *Vertigo*, part vagina.

Along with Hitchcock, Polanski's apartment thrillers have also cropped up as touchstones in recent British debuts – witness *The Ones Below* (2015), *Under the Shadow* (2016) and *The Ghoul* (2016). With its solipsistic protagonist and simulation of a fracturing psyche, *Kaleidoscope* similarly draws heavily on the likes of *Repulsion* (1965) and *The Tenant* (1976), trapping us claustrophobically in Carl's dingy flat and troubled headspace for most of the running time. From the tiles in his kitchen to his garish patterned shirt, the film's brown, 70s design wastes no opportunity to reflect Carl's fragmented mind back at him.



Saddo of a doubt: Anne Reid, Toby Jones

The performance of Sinead Matthews (best known for her roles in Mike Leigh films) as Carl's duplicitous date Abby offers a welcome blast of air into this closed world. Frankly spoken and self-consciously desirable (albeit with her own ulterior motives), she's like a potty-mouthed Leigh character wandering into the Bates motel.

Carl, by contrast, is the kind of meek mummy's boy that Toby Jones can do in his sleep (there's a touch of his technician Gilderoy from 2012's *Berberian Sound Studio*), yet the part is damagingly underwritten for a character whose mental grapplings are supposed to keep us on tenterhooks. Whether it's his time in prison or the nature of his obviously oppressive upbringing, his past is purposefully left opaque. But with little flesh on its bones to go with the mess in his head, *Kaleidoscope* can only go round in confusing circles. The colourful pieces move, but the picture remains stubbornly two-dimensional.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Maggie Montieth
Matthew James Wilkinson
Written by
Rupert Jones
Director of Photography
Philipp Blaubach
Editor
Tommy Boulding

Production Designer
Adrian Smith
Composer
Mike Prestwood
Sound Design
Richard Lewis
Steve Parker
Costume Designer
Suzie Harman

©Kaleidoscope

Film Company Ltd
Production Companies
A Stigma Films production
in association with Dignity Group & Longships Films
Executive Producers
Phil Rhymer
Chris Reed

Cast
Toby Jones
Carl Woods
Anne Reid
Aileen
Sinead Matthews
Abby
Cecilia Noble
Monique
Karl Johnson
John
Frederick Schmidt
Wesley
Deborah Finlay
Maureen
Manjinder Virk
Officer Torrington
Tim Newton
Officer Fry
Clare Perkins
launderette assistant
Joseph Kloska
Joe
Andy Williams
plumber

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Pinpoint

London, the present. Following time spent in prison, Carl lives a solitary existence in his tower-block flat. Waking one morning on his sofa, he has a flashback to the events of the previous night, when he recalls strangling a woman in his bathroom.

The day before, Carl prepares for a date with Abby, a woman he has met online. He walks past a police cordon, where a body has been discovered. He and Abby meet at a nightclub, and Abby comes back to his flat. They talk and dance, but Carl avoids drinking. When he's in the bathroom, Abby searches his flat for valuables and pours vodka in his fruit juice. She injures herself while dancing and subsequently admits to Carl that she intended to steal from him.

The following morning, racked with guilt at Abby's murder, Carl begins disposing of the evidence of her visit. Aileen, his domineering mother, whose calls he's been ignoring, arrives at the flat, and he reluctantly allows her to stay. Detecting Carl's guilt, she taunts him, hinting at previous times when he's reacted violently to alcohol. Abby's boyfriend (also her accomplice) calls her phone, but Carl denies knowledge of her whereabouts.

Carl becomes increasingly anxious, as the press reports details of the discovered body. He experiences visions of his dead father, whom he sees bleeding, and of Abby sleeping in bed – but when he climbs in to join her, it's his mother. As relations with his mother reach a violent hysteria, he locks her in the bathroom, an act that mirrors his apparent murder of Abby. Abby arrives unexpectedly at the flat to collect her things: Carl has imagined her death. Aileen's presence at the flat is revealed to be a figment of his tormented imagination.

Lost in Paris

Belgium/France 2016
Directors: Abel & Gordon

Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

Lost in Paris is the fourth Franco-Belgian feature directed by, and starring, comic duo Dominique Abel (from Belgium) and Fiona Gordon (born in Australia and raised in Canada). With its primary colours, whimsical humour and slapstick, the film consolidates the Abel-Gordon universe built in *Iceberg* (2005), *Rumba* (2008) and *The Fairy* (2011) – except that this time the directors add into the mix veteran French guest stars Emmanuelle Riva (in one of her very last films) and Pierre Richard, not to mention the city of Paris.

After opening scenes in a cartoonish, snowbound Canada, much of the film takes place on the bridges and banks of the Seine, with views of the Eiffel Tower in the background. Fiona (Gordon) is in Paris at the invitation of her elderly Aunt Martha (Riva), whom she spends most of the film failing to meet, mostly because the old lady has disappeared, and also because of Fiona's – comically exploited – poor grasp of French. Instead, after falling into the Seine and losing her rucksack, she bonds with the homeless Dom (Abel), who both rescues and steals her possessions.

While there is a narrative of sorts (Fiona finding Martha), *Lost in Paris* progresses through a series of cute comic vignettes and mostly visual gags, which explains why Abel and Gordon's work has regularly been compared to the films of Jacques Tati and Pierre Etaix and classic silent comics such as Keaton and Chaplin. But there is also something more contemporary and 'edgy' in the film's peculiar humour, which the French call *décalé* – quirky but slightly unsettling and self-conscious. Some of the scenes involving Martha tread a risky line, mocking her eccentricity and/or senility (posting a letter in a waste bin, for example), and there are jokes of questionable taste about attending the wrong funeral and crying over someone who is not dead.

Riva is delightful in her (too) rare scenes, and one of the pleasures of this film is to see her in a role that deliberately contrasts with the dominant tragic image of Michael Haneke's *Amour* (2012).

Canada goof: Fiona Gordon

Here she plays an incorrigible old lady who does a runner in order to escape those who want to put her in an old people's home; among other things she kisses a young neighbour on the mouth, performs a little 'tap dance' while sitting on a bench with an old lover (Richard), and enjoys a late sexual encounter with the much younger Dom. While some of the cute/quaint humour around Dom and Fiona can be grating, their best scenes display their inventive physicality, as in a wonderful dance in a restaurant and a vertigo-inducing caper on the Eiffel Tower.

The use of the city in *Lost in Paris* may well prove to be a double-edged weapon, situating the film between cliché and recognition. Although the directors have tried to renew the iconography by shooting a number of scenes on the Ile aux Cygnes, the less touristy island that contains the replica of the Statue of Liberty, the Eiffel Tower still plays its familiar role as comic-romantic landmark. In this *Lost in Paris* recalls a host of other films, from René Clair's *The Crazy Ray* (1924) to many New Wave works and – inevitably – Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amélie* (2001). On the other hand, the Parisian imagery should ensure a wider distribution for the film and greater international exposure for Abel and Gordon's comic talent, a unique mix of poetry, energetic grace and irreverent slapstick. S

Credits and Synopsis

Directors
['A film by']
Abel & Gordon
[i.e. Dominique Abel Fiona Gordon]
Producers
Abel & Gordon
Christie Molia
Charles Gillibert
Screenplay
['A film by']
Abel & Gordon
Directors of Photography
Claire Childéric
Jean-Christophe Leforestier
Editor
Sandrine Deegen
Art Director
Nicolas Girault
Sound Recordists
Fred Meert
Arnaud Calvar
Costume Designer
Claire Dubien

©Courage mon amour, Moteur s'il vous plait, CG Cinéma
Production Companies
Produced by
Courage mon amour, Moteur s'il vous plait, CG Cinéma
In co-production with SCOPE Pictures, VOO - Be tv, Proximus
A film by Abel & Gordon
With the participation of Canal+, Ciné+
With the assistance of Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles
In association with Cinémage 10
With the support of CNC (Nouvelles technologies en production), MEDIA Programme of the European Union
Produced with the support of Tax Shelter du gouvernement belge via SCOPE Invest
Developed with the support of mk2 Développement

Cast
Dominique Abel
Dom
Fiona Gordon
Fiona
Emmanuelle Riva
Martha
Pierre Richard
Norman
Emmy Boissard Paumelle
Fiona as a child
Céline Laurentie
Martha as a young woman

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Arrow Films

Belgian theatrical title
Paris pieds nus

Canada, present day. Shy librarian Fiona receives a letter from Martha, her 88-year-old aunt, asking her to visit her in Paris. Once there, Fiona fails to find her aunt at home, as the defiant old lady is bent on escaping those who want her to go into an old people's home. Fiona experiences a number of mishaps in the city, including falling into the Seine and losing her rucksack and all her possessions, including her passport. Dom, a homeless man, finds the rucksack and spends Fiona's money on a champagne dinner by the river, which Fiona also attends; they end up dancing together. Dom helps Fiona search for Martha. Being told that Martha is dead, they go to the Père Lachaise cemetery, but attend the funeral of another woman. Martha meets Dom in his tent by the Seine, while Fiona is taken by the police to Martha's flat. Eventually, Fiona and Dom track Martha down at the Eiffel Tower. After her death, they throw her ashes into the river. Fiona decides to stay in Paris with Dom.

Manifesto

Director: Julian Rosefeldt
Certificate 15 98m 50s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. All art is fake," insists Cate Blanchett's glossy US newsreader. She's crisply reporting Sol LeWitt's edicts – "There's no reason to suppose that the conceptual artist is out to bore the viewer" – in one of the art-performance vignettes that make up *Manifesto*. No danger of boredom either in this bold, playful and defiantly cerebral cinema version of Julian Rosefeldt's 2016 multi-screen art installation. Both an artwork and a thoughtful, teasing interrogation of modern art, it marries Rosefeldt's intense interest in avant-garde manifestos with Blanchett's talent for shapeshifting. Transformed, Cindy Sherman-style, into everything from male tramp to tattooed punk, she gives 13 bravura performances in which she simply recites from artists' statements.

Rather than the one-note samba this suggests, the manifestos are delivered in richly various ways and settings – muttered as prayers, declaimed as a eulogy, shared as a confidence. There's an added piquancy, too, in having them all spoken by a woman. As Rosefeldt notes, most manifestos are insistent, exuberant shouts written by young men and "practically bursting with testosterone". But here, Malevich's order to the artist to be "fishing himself out of the rubbishy slough of academic art" arrives via soft-voiced elevator and tannoy announcements to Blanchett's hazmat-suited scientist. Or a wealthy CEO toasts her party guests with a silky stream of vorticist imperatives.

These dramatisations play cleverly with the lively, performative qualities of many of the manifestos, the older ones especially emerging as freshly thought-provoking, poetic or funny. Delivered at a graveside, Tristan Tzara's invocations sound quasi-biblical – until "From now on, we want to shit in different colours" provides a dadaist shock.

The vignettes themselves are staged like short films, designer Erwin Prib filling them with exquisitely revealing details. A southern US mother delivers Claes Oldenburg's pop-art musings as an interminable grace at table, while the camera discovers *Psycho*-worthy taxidermy in the next room. The punk espousing stridentism with a curled lip struts and lounges in a smoky room full of band members. Cinematographer Christoph Krauss shoots a broker's trading floor high and wide like an Andreas Gursky photograph, appropriately sleek for the accompanying futurist voiceover. Form occasionally threatens to trump content, however, as when the scientist explores the sci-fi strangeness of an anechoic chamber. Then the manifesto dwindles to merely declamatory prose, the balance of urgent theory and intriguing scene lost.

The playlets demand a lot from the viewer, but their pleasures are nonetheless accessible to those unversed in art history – though since they're caption-free, you can find yourself playing manifesto bingo, eager to guess and tick off the welter of unidentified art proclamations. The film's linearity encourages this kind of deep-diving, unlike the original art installation, where spectators wandered between screens constructing their own bespoke views.

Despite its handsome looks and long, elegant shots, *Manifesto* was filmed in just 12 days. Kudos, then, to Blanchett, whose performances have a

Beanie baby: Cate Blanchett

startling intensity that shocks each sequence into life. Alongside the absurd or amusing interludes – such as the Russian choreographer lashing a rehearsal with insistent Fluxus quotations – there are some where she marries text and context to devastating effect. As a puppetmaker creating a tiny, uncanny copy of herself, she uses André Breton's surrealist exhortations to "kill, fly faster, love to your heart's content" like an eerie spell.

Together, she and Rosefeldt have created an extraordinarily striking piece, by obeying one of the film's final maxims (it's from Jim Jarmusch): "Steal from anywhere that resonates with inspiration or fuels your imagination."

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Julian Rosefeldt
Written by
Julian Rosefeldt
Director of Photography
Christoph Krauss
Editor
Bobby Good
Production Designer
Erwin Prib
Music
Nils Frahm
Ben Lukas Boysen
Sound Recordist
David Hilgers
Costume Designer
Bina Daigeler

Production Companies
Filmrise and Julian Rosefeldt present
Produced by
Julian Rosefeldt in co-operation with the Bayerischer Rundfunk
Co-produced by The ACMI - Australian Centre for the Moving Image Melbourne, The Art Gallery of New South Wales Sydney, The Nationalgalerie - Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, The Sprengel Museum Hannover, The Burger Collection Hong Kong and The Ruhrtriennale
Realized thanks to the generous support of the Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg and in cooperation with the Bayerischer Rundfunk
Executive Producers
Wassili Zygouris
Marcos Kantis
Martin Lehwald

Cast
Cate Blanchett
prologue voiceover/homeless man/broker/worker in a garbage incineration plant/CEO at a private party/tattooed punk/scientist/funeral speaker/puppeteer/conservative mother with family/choreographer/newsreader and reporter/teacher

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
More2screen

The actress Cate Blanchett portrays 13 different characters in vignettes using a 'text collage' of avant-garde art manifestos. A voiceover quotes the Communist Manifesto while old ladies let off fireworks. A male tramp wanders an abandoned estate shouting about situationism. A New York broker trades while a voiceover delivers the Futurist Manifesto. A recycling-plant worker thinks about architectural manifestos. A hazmat-suited scientist hears suprematist and constructivist extracts as elevator and tannoy announcements. An elegant mourner reads dadaist texts over a grave. A suburban American mom intones Claes Oldenburg's 'I am for an Art' as grace at table. A British punk espouses stridentism. A wealthy art-world hostess proclaims vorticism. A fierce Russian choreographer rehearses dancers with Fluxus quotations. A puppetmaker makes a model, quoting the Surrealist Manifesto. A US news anchor and reporter discuss conceptual art. A teacher delivers project instructions taken from the Dogme manifesto. A grid of all the characters talking at the same pitch ends the film.

The Man Who Invented Christmas

Ireland/Canada/United Kingdom/USA 2017
Director: Bharat Nalluri
Certificate PG 103m 46s

Reviewed by Patrick Fahy

Beloved British writers who become film protagonists can expect a rough ride, travelling through wrenching grief to growth. Heartbreak and loss have attended variously the bard (*Shakespeare in Love*, 1998), Jane Austen (*Becoming Jane*, 2006), Beatrix Potter (*Miss Potter*, 2006), J.M. Barrie (*Finding Neverland*, 2004), C.S. Lewis (*Shadowlands*, 1993), A.A. Milne (*Goodbye Christopher Robin*, 2017) and Charles Dickens, whose domestic discontent in the latter years of his life was chronicled in *The Invisible Woman* (2012). That leaves the young Dickens, in the cheery *The Man Who Invented Christmas*, to face trials that seem small beer indeed: writer's block, paying the decorators and being taunted by Thackeray at the Garrick Club.

Set in 1843 and directed by Bharat Nalluri (of the BBC's *Hustle* and *Spooks* and the 2014 feature *Spooks: The Greater Good*), this is a well-acted, determinedly warm-hearted, slightly overstretched account of debt-ridden Dickens's six-week stint writing *A Christmas Carol*, his gambit, after three flops, to restore his own popularity and that of the benevolent season.

The novelty is that, just as Scrooge is visited by the spirits, so Dickens's characters 'appear' before him as he writes, inspired by people he has seen, and led, naturally, by Scrooge. Here Christopher Plummer, a memorably urbane villain in 2002's underrated *Nicholas Nickleby*, has a ball. Worldly, dismissive, scowling and arrogant, he harangues Dickens, scorning his values, crowing at his failings and prodding his psyche where it hurts, like a hybrid of Jiminy Cricket and Hannibal Lecter. At one stage, Dickens is torn between his housemaid's horror at the death of Tiny Tim (it ought to be a happy book) and Scrooge's hearty approval (child mortality is realistic).

With the novel's success a given, the dramatic beef becomes Dickens's unresolved anger towards his father John (Jonathan Pryce, perfectly cast), a penniless *bon vivant* forever cadging candlesticks or cigars, rummaging through his son's bins for discarded signatures he can flog. Only when he forgives his father does Dickens find his book's ending. Flashbacks reminiscent of P.L. Travers's childhood trauma in *Saving Mr Banks* (2013) show how John was sent to the debtors' prison one Christmas, and young Charlie had to work in a hellish boot-blacking factory. Though they explain Dickens's loathing of poverty, these scenes never seem fully welded to the main narrative, and likening the writer's cathartic breakthrough to Scrooge's conversion is a false equivalence. Scrooge is unkind because he hates mankind; Dickens is frustrated by one incorrigible man he has been endlessly kind to.

The film teems with pleasing detail, from a decrepit solicitor's maggot-ridden biscuit to the bustle of Dickens's home, all dustsheets, tradesmen and children. London's celebrity milieu also rings true. Dickens pitches ideas to his publishers like a Hollywood screenwriter, and when golden boy Thackeray gloats about reviews and sales, you can imagine him today monitoring his likes and retweets.

Dan Stevens (*Downton Abbey*) makes an entertaining Dickens, tossing off lines to sound natural and funny, and conveying light-bulb thoughts through glinting eyes. There are lovely performances from Justin Edwards as Dickens's agent, exuding gentle-giant bonhomie long before we see which character he inspires, Anna Murphy as the Irish maid with a helpful feeling for spooky storytelling, and Morfydd Clark as Dickens's underappreciated wife. In one poignant scene, her patience breaks and she tells him, not unkindly, how difficult he is to live with.

The film grasps that the novel's appeal is its resonance as an examination of conscience. We first see Dickens checking himself in a mirror: his book will become a mirror in which he, and we, will check ourselves annually for any creeping Scrooge-like qualities. When Marley's ghost appears, encumbered by the chains of a lifetime's misdirected passions, he asks Dickens about his own chains ("You, Charlie, your chains, all around you..."). Dickens is startled that the question is aimed at him and not at Scrooge. The film suggests that, in *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens aims the question at us all.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Robert Mickelson
Ian Sharples
Susan Mullen
Niv Fichman
Vadim Jean
Written by
Susan Coyne
Based on [the book] by Les Standiford
Inspired by Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*
Director of Photography
Ben Smithard
Editors
James Pearson
Stephen O'Connell
Production Designer
Paki Smith
Music
Mychael Danna
Sound Mixer
Danny Crowley
Costume Designer
Leonie Prendergast

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Production Companies
Produced with the participation of Téléfilm Canada and Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board, Ontario Media Development Corporation
A Parallel Films, Rhombus Media production
In association with Mystic Point Productions, The Mob Film Company, Nelly Films Limited and The Mazur/Kaplan Company
Produced with the participation of Ingenious Media
Produced in association with The Movie Network
Produced with the assistance of the Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit
Developed in association with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Content Media Corporation
Executive Producers
Paula Mazur
Mitchell Kaplan
Andrew Karpen
Laurie May
Lisa Wilson
Johanna Hogan
Alan Moloney
Susan Coyne
David Leiwant
Wayne Marc Godfrey
Robert Jones

Cast
Dan Stevens
Charles Dickens
Christopher Plummer
Scrooge/man at burial
Jonathan Pryce
Mr John Dickens
Justin Edwards
John Forster/Ghost of Christmas Present
Morfydd Clark
Kate Dickens
Donald Sumpter
Haddock, solicitor/ghost of Marley
Miles Jupp
Thackeray
Simon Callow
John Leech
Miriam Margolyes
Mrs Fisk
Ian McNeice
Chapman
Bill Paterson
Mr Grimsby
Ely Solan
young Charles

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Thunderbird Releasing

London, 1843. Charles Dickens starts writing 'A Christmas Carol', eager to re-establish the season's lost wonder. Wrestling writer's block, he finds inspiration in the misery and goodness he sees around him. Scrooge and other characters 'appear' to him, discussing plot and enacting scenes.

Dickens's parents visit. His father John vexes him with his sponging and spending. Only after rejecting Scrooge's insults of John and forgiving his father can Dickens devise his story's ending. The book proves an instant success, restoring the popularity of both Dickens and Christmas.

Marshall

USA 2017
Director: Reginald Hudlin
Certificate 15 118m 21s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Chronologically tightly focused and heavily embellished, this biopic of Thurgood Marshall doesn't take as its starting point his marquee career achievements – Brown v Board of Education, his appointment as the first black justice on the US Supreme Court – and instead portrays him through the lens of the relatively obscure case of State of Connecticut v Joseph Spell.

In 1940, Marshall (Chadwick Boseman, essaying another black hero following turns as Jackie Robinson and James Brown en route to the forthcoming *Black Panther*) arrives in Greenwich, Connecticut, to defend chauffeur Joseph Spell (Sterling K. Brown), charged with the rape and attempted murder of his employer's wife (Kate Hudson). Nothing about the case scans right, from the prosecution's nonsensical narrative to the overtly racist newspaper coverage, heavy with ugly caricatures and appeals to white panic. Jewish insurance lawyer Sam Friedman (Josh Gad) is the attorney of record but, wanting nothing to do with the case, he plans to turn it over to Marshall as soon as possible. However, when the clearly racist judge (James Cromwell) rules that, as an out-of-state lawyer, Marshall may sit in the sessions but not speak, Friedman, though inexperienced in criminal law, is forced to act as his mouthpiece.

Some early reviews have questioned why this biopic of a black hero assigns equal focus to his white co-star: is it still the thankless role of black protagonists to mentor white men? The answer can be found in interviews with Michael Koskoff, the veteran attorney who originated the project and co-wrote the script with his screenwriter son Jacob. The elder Koskoff, who in the 1970s defended the Black Panthers, has a stated interest in "the kind of heroism that Jewish people have over the years experienced and demonstrated in helping the cause of racial equality", forming a "bond" that is "an old one and a strong one" – a rosy reading of a complicated history.

Marshall is accordingly a buddy movie, in which two awkwardly yoked protagonists gradually achieve mutual respect. Considerable liberties are taken with the historical record in this arc's interests, notably the fabrication of a night in which Marshall and Friedman are separately attacked by small groups of racist men, the film crosscutting between the (simultaneous!) assaults to underline the shared solidarity that's about to ensue. Boseman wins his fight, Friedman merely survives his: the former portrays the future justice as a kind of swaggering cowboy, quick to verbal cutting-down-to-size of ignorant white people and physical self-preservation as necessary. It's a bit of a fiction but refreshingly low on Great Man pathos, keeping lines such as (from a grateful mother) "I'm thankful [my daughter] Irene got to see there are men like you in the world" to a minimum, and buoying the tone with a breezy jazz score from veteran session man Marcus Miller.

Test case: Gad, Boseman, Brown

Like so many social-issues biopics, *Marshall* leans too heavily on the assumption that worthy subject matter makes it an important and powerful work. It has no real insight or memorable scenes but does nothing actively wrong and may make for decent middle-school classroom viewing. The mother and father of Trayvon Martin – the African-American 17-year-old shot dead in Florida in 2012 for the crime, essentially, of wearing a hoodie – are cast as Mississippi parents welcoming Marshall to his next case: a frightening, subtle coup. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Reginald Hudlin
Jonathan Sanger
Paula Wagner
Written by
Michael Koskoff
Jacob Koskoff
Director of Photography
Newton Thomas Sigel
Edited by
Tom McArdle
Production Designer
Richard Hoover
Music
Marcus Miller

Sound Mixer
Antonio Arroyo
Costume Designer
Ruth E. Carter

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Production Companies
Open Road Films, StarLight Media present a Hero Film production
A Chestnut Ridge production
A Hudlin Entertainment production
Executive Producers
Lei Luo
Hunter Ryan
David Ryan
Chris Bongirne
Kevin Lamb
Brandon Powers
John Cappetta
Bradley Eisenstein
Xu Yan
Lai Pan
Lili Sun
Jianchun Wang
Jun Dong
Tom Ortenberg

Cast
Chadwick Boseman
Thurgood Marshall
Josh Gad
Sam Friedman
Kate Hudson
Eleanor Strubing
Dan Stevens
Loren Willis
Sterling K. Brown
Joseph Spell
James Cromwell
Judge Foster
Keesha Sharp
Buster Marshall
Roger Guenveur Smith
Walter White
Marina Squerciati
Stella Friedman
Daniel Stewart Sherman
Officer McCoy
Derrick Baskin
Ted Lancaster
John Magaro
Irwin Friedman
Jeremy Bobb
John Strubing
Jussie Smollett
Langston Hughes
Jeffrey DeMunn
Doctor Sayer
Ahna O'Reilly
Mrs Richmond

In Colour [2.20:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing

US, 1940. On an extended road trip acting as defence counsel in a series of racially charged cases, NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall arrives in Greenwich, Connecticut, to defend Joseph Spell, a black chauffeur charged with raping Eleanor Strubing, his employer's wife, and throwing her off a bridge. Sam Friedman, a white lawyer, has reluctantly agreed to serve as the attorney introducing Marshall to the court, but wants nothing more to do with the case. When the presiding judge rules that Marshall may attend but not speak, Friedman is forced to become his mouthpiece. As the trial progresses, tension builds between the two. After a particularly dispiriting day in court, both are assaulted by small groups of racist men. Spell professes his total innocence, but a doctor testifies that pieces of his skin were found under Strubing's fingernails. Under questioning from Marshall, Spell admits that he had consensual sex with Strubing but did not throw her off the bridge. After introducing numerous pieces of evidence in court undermining the prosecution's theory, the defence rests. Marshall is called away to begin work on another case in Mississippi; in his absence, Friedman delivers a convincing closing speech. Spell is found not guilty.

Most Beautiful Island

USA 2017
Director: Ana Asesnio
Certificate 18 79m 25s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

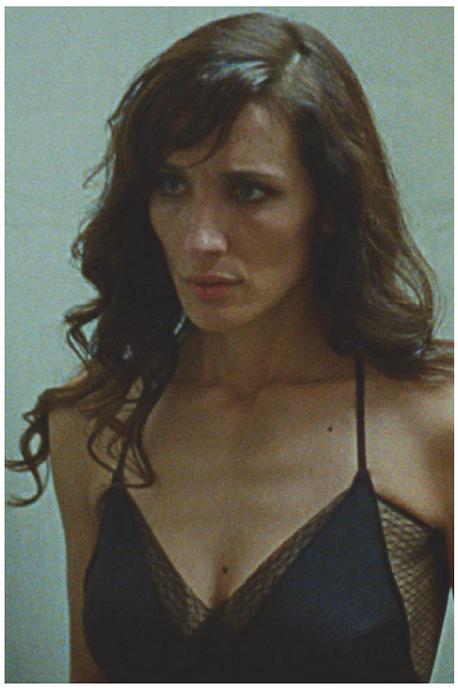
Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

The struggle to 'make it' in New York has been the subject of countless books, TV shows and films, but few approach the bitter authenticity of Ana Asensio's *Most Beautiful Island*, which is based on her own experiences of being an undocumented immigrant.

Unlike the denizens of *Girls* or *Broad City*, Luciana (Asensio) has no unspoken financial buffer – she's completely broke, despite working multiple lousy jobs (such as handing out fliers for a restaurant while dressed as a sexy chicken). Perpetually running late, overdue on rent and relying on the kindness of acquaintances, the only thing she has is her looks. Tall, slim and still relatively young, she could probably be a model if only she could get enough sleep and take that pinched, stressed look off her face. Salvation seems to come in the form of Olga, a fellow sexy chicken and failed Russian model, who tells her there's a job that pays two grand a night just to show up at a party. Luciana gladly accepts, and dashes around Manhattan to prepare for the mysterious gig.

The strongest filmmaking is in the build-up to this Faustian bargain, with deft camerawork blending subjectivity and a documentary feel to convey the anxiety of having neither the time nor the money to do anything properly. Luciana purposefully damages a little black designer dress in a changing room, and then manages to take it off the shop assistant's hands for $20; she stiffs a cabbie because she has no money to pay him; she runs around numberless storefronts in Chinatown searching for the address of the mysterious party, only to discover that it must be reached through a cellar door in the pavement. Throughout this frantic journey, we are treated to a truly diverse New York, a city overwhelmingly populated by people just scraping by, connected by purely functional English – these are not aspiring twentysomethings who can always call mom and dad if they need a root canal.

Unfortunately, *Most Beautiful Island* loses steam at what is clearly meant to be its climax. Arriving late at her destination, an enormous warehouse next to the bleak West Side Highway, Luciana discovers a group of other beautiful foreign women standing in a semicircle like a sad, desperate UN delegation. A haughty mistress of ceremonies, apparently Eastern European, leads 'chosen' women into a separate room, full of wealthy party guests. When, after a few attempts to escape (including the old 'make out with a guard when pretending to use the bathroom' trick), Luciana and Olga get their turn, they are told to lie naked in a glass coffin and let a deadly spider crawl over them for a designated amount of time, measured with a miniature hourglass. Olga starts to freak out, but Luciana calmly puts her hand into Olga's coffin and lets the spider crawl on her, impressing the emcee. The scene is meant to be suspenseful, but the inherent silliness of seeing a spider crawl on a woman's butt while a roomful of bland Manhattan socialites look on isn't transcended. There are enough close-ups of spiders to trouble arachnophobes, but for everyone else, a nature documentary would likely be more thrilling. The rushed and anticlimactic denouement also makes the



Naked city: Ana Asesnio

film seem a bit underdeveloped and muddled. That Luciana will live to fight another day is no surprise – like everyone she's encountered over this very long day, there's no option not to.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jenn Wexler
Chadd Harbold
Ana Asensio
Producers
Larry Fessenden
Noah Greenberg
Written by
Ana Asesnio
Director of Photography
Noah Greenberg
Editor
Francisco Bello
Production Design
Almitra Corey
Music
Jeffery Alan Jones
Sound Design
Jeffery Alan Jones
Costume Designers
Veronica Cárdenas
Geanme Marin

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Production Companies
Glass Eye Pix presents a Palomo Films production
Executive Producers
Peter Phok
Jose María García
Ahmet Bilgen
Selim Cevikel
Christopher Todd
Gill Holland

Cast
Ana Asesnio
Luciana
Natasha Romanova
Olga
David Little
Doctor Horovitz
Nicholas Tucci
Niko
Larry Fessenden
Rudy
Caprice Benedetti
Vanessa
Anna Myrha
Nadia
Ami Sheth
Benedita
Miriam Hyman
Bikie
Sara Visser
Katarin
Natalia Zvereva
Ewa
Jennifer Wolf
Mai
Fenella Chudoba
Alina

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Bulldog Film Distribution

New York City, present day. Luciana arrives home to find a note from her roommate about late rent. She goes to hand out fliers for a fried chicken restaurant with Olga, who tells her about a job that pays well just for attending a party. Luciana buys a dress for the party, then goes to pick up some children from karate practice. They're angry because she's late. A neighbour agrees to watch them for her. Arriving at the party, she stands in a room with a group of other women, similarly dressed. One by one they are called into another room. One woman returns crying and screaming. Luciana tries to escape but is brought back by a security guard. When it's their turn, Luciana and Olga go into the room and are forced to lie naked in glass coffins while a poisonous spider crawls over them. Olga can't stand it, but Luciana remains calm. She is paid and leaves the party.

No Stone Unturned

United Kingdom/USA 2017
Director: Alex Gibney

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

It may seem surprising that with *No Stone Unturned* Alex Gibney has chosen to focus on a particular terrorist incident from Northern Ireland's Troubles – one that, however appalling in its own way, was by no means the conflict's worst loss of life, nor perceived in retrospect as a turning point towards the peace process. For a filmmaker who has covered such hot-button topics as child abuse in the Catholic Church, superpower cyber-conflict, WikiLeaks and US military misconduct in Afghanistan, it might appear to be a sideways step to cast his attention towards the 1994 Loughinisland massacre, in which six people were killed and five wounded when loyalist gunmen sprayed a country pub with bullets as customers watched the Republic of Ireland play in the football World Cup. As Gibney himself reveals in the narration, however, it was visiting this sleepy corner of County Down for a short on the same subject – 2014's *Ceasefire Massacre* segment for ESPN's *30 for 30: Soccer Stories* – that garnered his sympathy for the relatives who'd spent long years waiting for justice. The forensic evidence was available, arrests had been made, so why had no prosecutions been forthcoming?

The result is an absorbing and committed if slightly ragged account, exposing shocking (but not altogether surprising) details about the British government's historical security policy in Northern Ireland. The film starts with a few missteps: a reconstruction of the shooting itself, which plays like something from a cheesy TV true-crime programmer; an entirely overstated notion that the Irish team's World Cup success might somehow bring a peace breakthrough in the north; and the hoariest of NI movie clichés pairing a quiet country road with keening uilleann pipes on the soundtrack.

Evidently speaking to a US audience, Gibney then delivers a primer on the Troubles, which proves even-handed in detailing the awful cycle of tit-for-tat slaughter as loyalist terror groups picked off innocent Catholic civilians in response to the IRA's campaign of bombings and shootings. He doesn't quite capture the despair engulfing the province through the 1980s and into the 1990s, as Westminster's steadfast

Troubles in mind: *No Stone Unturned*

attempts to leave the Republicans politically isolated created a seemingly intractable and decidedly bloody impasse, but he does at least set the scene for the notion of collusion, where the British army and the RUC were not only running a network of informers within the terror groups on both sides, but seemed content to let loyalist gunmen operate unchallenged in their murderous activities, since it inflicted casualties within the broader Republican community – a strategy chillingly dubbed "returning the serve".

In a bitter irony, the huge steps forward achieved by the peace process in the intervening years have only made it more difficult for the relatives of the Loughinisland victims to pierce the wall of official silence surrounding the failed investigation. But Gibney is at his best here, both in his dogged detective work and in his facility for factual exposition, leading the viewer through a thicket of testimony, anonymous tip-offs and leaked reports. In the end, while we're still left wondering what exactly British government higher-ups knew about the corruption and collusion Gibney brings to light, the fact that the film names the killers and pieces together an unredacted account of the events of that fateful day is clearly a great service to the victims' long-suffering relatives. What he has achieved is surely more significant in broader terms than any critical cavils about this or that particular detail on screen, and on a purely human level reflects great credit on him.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Trevor Birney
Written by
Alex Gibney
Directors of Photography
Stan Harlow
Ross McDonnell
Edited by
Andy Grieve
Production Designer
David Craig
Original Music
Ivor Guest
Robert Logan
Sound Recordists
David Kilpatrick
Colm O'Meara
Marty Harrison
Michael McKnight
Peter Miller
Michael Jones
Wardrobe Mistress
Susan Scott

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Production Companies
Fine Point Films presents in association with Jigsaw Productions and Kew Media Group and Northern Ireland Screen a film by Alex Gibney
Executive Producers
Maiken Baird
Greg Phillips
Jonathan Ford
Richard Perello
Brendan J. Byrne
Stacey Offman
for Northern Ireland Screen:
Andrew Reid

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Wildcard Distribution

A documentary investigating Northern Ireland's 1994 Loughinisland massacre, when loyalist gunmen opened fire inside a small County Down pub where drinkers were watching the World Cup soccer match between Ireland and Italy. Six people were killed and five injured. In the aftermath, though ample forensic evidence was available, the RUC made little progress towards a prosecution, and with the province's political landscape altered soon afterwards by paramilitary ceasefires prompting the peace process, it seemed that the victims' families would never see justice. The 2011 publication of a report by the police ombudsman was seen as a whitewash and subsequently quashed. While newly appointed ombudsman Michel Maguire works towards the 2016 publication of a revised report, filmmaker Alex Gibney examines anonymous tip-offs and previously unpublished draft investigations to name the killers and reveal they were informants working for the security forces, thus suggesting that collusion explains the lack of prosecutions in the case.

Only the Brave

USA 2017
Director: Joseph Kosinski
Certificate 12A 133m 28s

Reviewed by Nikki Baughan

Heroism and patriotism are the building blocks of *Only the Brave*, which celebrates both with a blunt-edged fervour that undermines the film's emotional impact. While the events on which it is based are worth retelling, the incendiary experiences of an elite group of US firefighters have been doused by a join-the-dots screenplay that fails to connect with the human heart of the story.

In the wild landscape of Arizona, where forest fires are an ever-present threat, chief Eric Marsh (Josh Brolin) leads his Granite Mountain team with a firm but fair hand, pushing them as they train to achieve the 'Hotshot' status that will allow them to implement their own wildfire suppression tactics, rather than having to defer to other squads.

Marsh's crew, which includes Chris MacKenzie (Taylor Kitsch) and Jesse Steed (James Badge Dale), is a tight-knit and dedicated bunch; as we see in several large-scale action sequences, they work well together in the intense, disorienting heat of a blaze. But when Marsh takes a chance on new recruit Brendan McDonough (Miles Teller), a formerly incarcerated drug addict trying to rebuild his life after the birth of his daughter, the group's dynamic is tested.

From its generic title down, the greater part of *Only the Brave* plays like a run-of-the-mill actioner; piecemeal editing and Joseph Trapanese's stirring soundtrack introduce us to the various characters and their death-defying work. In the grand tradition of the genre, screenwriters Ken Nolan (*Black Hawk Down, Transformers: The Last Knight*) and Eric Warren Singer resolutely hit all the narrative beats, upping the dramatic stakes inch by familiar inch. That Marsh is an outspoken maverick who gets the job done is made clear in his gruff altercations with authority figures; that the men all have plenty to lose is highlighted by happy backyard family barbecues.

Fire and fury: Miles Teller, Josh Brolin

Performances are suitably solid, even if most of the firefighters are reduced to ciphers of alpha masculinity. "Y'all are heroes," enthuses a pretty young nurse at one point, compounding a point that's already been hammered home to within an inch of its life. Brolin's central role allows for slightly more dramatic movement, as his recurring nightmares – of fires raging out of control, bears running aflame – and mention of past addictions speak to the psychological toll of the job. His relationship with wife Amanda (an underused Jennifer Connelly) is under increasing strain, forcing him to choose between his boys and his partner. That's an age-old cinematic conundrum, of course, but Brolin embraces both the vigour and vulnerability of his character.

It's Teller, however, who bears the real emotional weight of the film, and his performance – his best since *Whiplash* (2014) – transcends the material. While Brendan's journey from deadbeat to hero is also a familiar one, Teller brings to it a natural charisma and dogged resolve that you can't help rooting for. He also serves as the strongest onscreen reminder that the events we're witnessing happened to real people.

All this is building to the film's raison d'être: the gigantic Yarnell Hill fire, which took the lives of 19 of the Granite Mountain crew on 30 June 2013. With these sequences, and survivor Brendan's shell-shocked grief and desperate guilt, the film finally finds genuine emotional depth. Everything else is stripped away as these men lose their fight with the furious forces of nature, and the drum-beating machismo is replaced with a quiet humanity.

Visually, *Only the Brave* is impressive, cutting-edge computer effects giving the forest fires a terrifyingly kinetic life of their own. Yet films such as this always tread a fine line between entertainment and eulogy, and it's difficult to submit to the visual bombast when we know the tragic fate of the characters on screen. It's not that these men do not deserve to be honoured, their service and sacrifice recounted and remembered. It's that so much cinema is given over to similar stories of heroic men repackaged as gung-ho, testosterone-fuelled action. It's surely time to find a different way to tell these stories; and, indeed, to find different stories to tell.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Lorenzo di Bonaventura
Michael Menchel
Erik Howsam
Molly Smith
Thad Luckinbill
Trent Luckinbill
Dawn Ostroff
Jeremy Steckler
Written by
Ken Nolan
Eric Warren Singer
Based on the GQ article *No Exit* by Sean Flynn
Director of Photography
Claudio Miranda
Editor
Billy Fox
Production Designer
Kevin Kavanaugh
Music
Joseph Trapanese
Sound Designer
Al Nelson
Costume Designer
Louise Mingenbach

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Production Companies
Columbia Pictures presents a Black Label Media presentation
A di Bonaventura Pictures, Condé Nast Entertainment, Black Label Media, Relevant Entertainment production
Executive Producer
Ellen H. Schwartz

Cast
Josh Brolin
Eric Marsh, 'Supe'
Miles Teller
Brendan McDonough
Jeff Bridges
Duane Steinbrink
James Badge Dale
Jesse Steed
Taylor Kitsch
Chris MacKenzie
Jennifer Connelly
Amanda Marsh
Andie MacDowell
Marvel Steinbrink

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

Arizona, June 2013. From their base in the town of Prescott, the Granite Mountain firefighting team battle the wildfires that threaten neighbouring communities. Experienced chief Eric Marsh pushes his crew as they train for the 'Hotshot' status that will allow them to implement wildfire suppression tactics on the ground. The dynamic of this tight-knit team is disturbed when Marsh takes on troubled new recruit Brendan, a former drug addict who is attempting to turn his life around after the birth of his daughter. Marsh is facing his own struggles, as his marriage is under pressure owing to the stresses of his job. As the crew come together and achieve Hotshot status, they face their greatest challenge: the huge Yarnell Hill fire. At the end of two days' firefighting, 19 members of the Granite Mountain team are dead.

Professor Marston and the Wonder Women

USA 2017, Director: Angela Robinson, Certificate 15 108m 13s

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

The word 'preposterous' crops up at two crucial junctures in *Professor Marston and the Wonder Women*. It is first used to describe the dream that – conventions and financial necessity be damned – love is all one needs to get along in life. The subject under discussion is whether two disgraced former academics and their pregnant student can set up home together, and the film will indeed explore the feasibility of a *ménage à trois* household in 1930s and 1940s America. The second instance is less controversial, a description of Wonder Woman's thigh-grazing hemline. In both instances, for this charming polyamorous threesome, it seems that preposterousness is nothing to be afraid of.

Happily, catastrophic preposterousness is kept successfully out of reach in this surprising film, which recounts the unlikely-sounding story behind the creation of the *Wonder Woman* comic. Basically, it's this: the comic's creator was a former Harvard academic, William Marston (Luke Evans), who invented the polygraph lie detector. The character of Wonder Woman was inspired partly by his psychological theories, his feminist impulses and his experience as a spy during World War I, but even more so by his wife and mistress and their shared enjoyment of bondage and role play.

The film tells this story in flashbacks, which interrupt the interrogation of the author by a representative from the Child Study Association of America (Connie Britton), who is taking him to task over the hypersexualised, politically subversive content of the *Wonder Woman* comics. In the flashbacks, Marston is happily married to the brilliant, neurotic and foul-mouthed Elizabeth (Rebecca Hall) when pretty blonde student Olive Byrne (Bella Heathcote) catches his eye. Elizabeth is enjoyably scathing about the obviousness of his attraction, but also wounded. Soon, she'll be equally drawn to Olive, not just for her apple-cheeked beauty, but for her first-class feminist heritage (her mother and aunt were activists who opened the first birth-control clinic in the US) and the steady way she wields a spanking paddle at a sorority party.

Of course, none of the above is more ludicrous than Wonder Woman's official, Amazonian origin story, as depicted in the recent blockbuster directed by Patty Jenkins. There are a few nodding references for the comic-book fan to enjoy, from the first outing of Wonder Woman's Amazonian outfit to a transparent toy aeroplane, cuff bangles and the pointed similarities between the superheroine's 'lasso of truth' and Marston's polygraph machine, but the tone is very different: dry wit and sentiment rather than racy action.

Professor Marston's director Angela Robinson has a solid background in female-centric TV as well as two previous feature credits to her name – the *Charlie's Angels* parody *D.E.B.S* (2004) and the Disney caper *Herbie Fully Loaded* (2005). Despite the comic-book source material, *Professor Marston*, with its tasteful palette of earth-toned vintage knitwear and wood panelling, is far less camp than either of those films or, say, Robinson's lesbian crime-thriller web series *Girltrash!* (2007-09). In opposition to the brazen rope games and skin-tight costumes in the comic, the sex

Three's company: Rebecca Hall, Luke Evans, Bella Heathcote

scenes here are discreetly, almost pallidly shot, so that an elaborately costumed threesome seems as innocent as a first teenage kiss.

Hall's coruscating performance as Elizabeth also adds weight. She's brilliant here: emotionally brittle, occasionally prudish, intellectually assertive and terribly charming despite a honking Boston accent. The scene in which she dissects an interaction between Olive and a suitor is both amusing and emotionally revealing. Olive and William are sweeter, simpler souls, more easily led by their own libidos. William is boyishly earnest in his enthusiasms, most of all his grand plan to inject his ideas "into the thumping heart of America" via an action serial. Elizabeth's hesitations about the relationship and the threats to their happiness from gossips and bullies form the film's major conflicts, rather than the struggle against censorship.

This is a love story and a very touching one, primarily and most passionately between the two women. Elizabeth is the true dominant in the relationship and, though they clearly love him, she and Olive often find William's *Wonder Woman*, his psychological theories about 'loving submission' and his pornography collection, well, preposterous. A caption reveals that after William died they lived together for decades, until Olive's own death. What seems to be a salacious superhero origin story becomes a dignified plea for the acceptance of non-heterosexual love, unorthodox households – and the right to insert bondage scenes into graphic novels or enjoy a spot of kinky sex when the kids have gone to school.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Terry Leonard
Amy Redford
Written by
Angela Robinson
Director of Photography
Bryce Fortner
Edited by
Jeffrey M. Werner
Production Designer
Carl Sprague
Music by/Score
Tom Howe
Sound Mixer
Jared Detsikas
Costume Designer
Donna Maloney

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Production Companies
Stage 6 Films
presents a Topple Pictures & Boxspring Entertainment production
In association with Opposite Field Pictures
Executive Producers
Andrea Sperling
Jill Soloway

Cast
Luke Evans
William Moulton
Marston
Rebecca Hall
Elizabeth Marston
Bella Heathcote
Olive Byrne
JJ Feild
Charles Guyette
Chris Conroy
Brant Gregory
Alexa Havins
Molly Stewart
Oliver Platt
M.C. Gaines
Connie Britton
Josette Frank
Monica Giordano
Mary
Maggie Castle
Dorothy Roubicek
Sharon Kubo
Kate
Allie Gallerani
Sara
Chris Gombos
Fred Steward

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

US, 1945. Amid controversy over his subversive, sexualised 'Wonder Woman' comics, author William Marston is called to a meeting with the Child Study Association of America. As he defends his work, flashbacks reveal the origin of the Wonder Woman character.

In 1928, Marston is teaching psychology at Radcliffe-Harvard. An attractive student, Olive Byrne, volunteers to assist him and his wife Elizabeth with their research. Elizabeth worries that Olive will sleep with William, but it transpires that Olive is mostly attracted to Elizabeth. Olive helps the couple achieve a breakthrough in the development of their lie detector and the three embark on a sexual relationship. When the university finds out, the Marstons are sacked. Olive is pregnant, so they all live together. They are happy and have four children. One day in 1940, William visits a fetish-wear shop and brings home some pornography. The women are shocked but come to a rope-play demonstration with him, where Olive dresses in an Amazonian outfit and Elizabeth ties her up. William begins writing a feminist comic book, incorporating his ideas about psychology as well as his enthusiasm for kink; the book is published as 'Wonder Woman'. When word gets out about the Marstons' unorthodox household, the children are bullied; Elizabeth asks Olive to leave.

Back in 1945, William is dying of cancer, and he and Elizabeth beg Olive to return. At a press conference, William says that Wonder Woman is a reflection of the strong women in his life.

School Life

Ireland/Spain 2016
Director: Neasa Ní Chianáin
Certificate 12A 99m 33s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

A steadfastly complimentary portrait of a mildly unconventional private school in Ireland, *School Life* functions less as an analysis either of a typical educational experience or an unusually transformative one, and more as a mildly defensive advertisement for the practice of paying to have your kids separated from poorer ones.

Possibly the pair of veteran teachers who preside over the institution, John and Amanda Leyden, are intended to strike the viewer as adorably eccentric; but those with bad memories of what Pink Floyd termed "dark sarcasm in the classroom" are unlikely to warm to John. He emerges almost immediately as the kind of teacher who really enjoys setting kids up to be wrong so that he can correct them; later, it's made jaw-droppingly clear that, after 40-plus years of teaching, he still needs his slightly more empathetic wife to point out to him that pubescent kids might experience insecurity and shyness. Headmaster Dermot Dix, himself an old boy of the school, is positioned as some sort of hippie radical by comparison with his colleagues – he "moved to the left", he says, during a period spent living in the US – but the filmmakers never challenge him on how his politics fit with teaching at a school that costs thousands of euros a term.

If it's gently funny to see Dix preaching vague radicalism in this patrician context – "If there's an inhuman rule, you should break it!" he weakly tells a class of kids being trained for obedience – it's inescapably peculiar for a film expressly focused on a private boarding school to make no effort at all to address either the private or the boarding aspects of its subject. Presumably there are various reasons why such young kids are being educated away from home, but these aren't brought into the light, and nor is any socioeconomic aspect of the set-up. "Don't worry," John tells some kids who are loath to abandon the forest fort they've built, "the barbarians aren't going to come and attack [it] during the night." But what barbarians these kids are being closeted away from, and whether the education they are receiving is safer or better as a result, is never even touched on. Where the film

Boarder territory: *School Life*

does dispense with the protection of its subjects' private lives is in allowing the educational and social skills of specific, named pupils to be openly discussed on camera.

One of the few instances of very minor drama occurs when Amanda finds a copy of Stephen King's *The Shining* in a desk ("Oh my goodness, who's reading that?"). The horror fiction of 1977 threatening to make itself known to pubescents! The outrage! This isn't the only bizarrely retro reference point. There's a mural of Jimi Hendrix in the music room; the set text in English class is by Enid Blyton; the school band covers The Undertones' 'Teenage Kicks' and The Troggs' 'Wild Thing'. Is the point of the film to lure potential new paying customers with the promise of a steadfastly unreconstructed environment into which to entrust their kids, complete with Latin lessons, patrician authority figures, no visible internet and, at the end of it all, a potential route into the higher echelons of exclusive education? Certainly one of the rare expressions of unironic glee from John Leyden comes when a boy is accepted into Harrow for his secondary years – further still, presumably, from the barbarians.

Credits and Synopsis

Co-directed by
David Rane
Produced by
David Rane
Cinematographer
Neasa Ní Chianáin
Edited by
Mirjam Strugalla
Music Composed by
Eryck Abecassis
Sound Designed by
Reto Stamm

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Production Companies
A Soilsiú Films production in association with Raidió Teilifís Éireann and Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board
In co-production with Corporación Radiotelevisión Española and GrisMedio
Soilsiú Films presents a film by Neasa Ní Chianáin
Co-produced by Corporación Radiotelevisión Española, GrisMedio
Developed and produced with the support of RTÉ/Raidió Teilifís Éireann
Funded by Broadcasting Authority of Ireland
Developed with the support of Creative Europe Programme of the European Union
Developed in association with EURODOC 2014
Developed and produced with the assistance of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board
Produced by Soilsiú Films
Executive Producers
for Grismedio:
Montse Portabella
for Bord Scannán na hÉirenn/The Irish Film Board:
Keith Potter

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Soilsiú Films

Kells, Ireland, the present. Headfort, a fee-paying private school catering to seven- to 14-year-olds, welcomes a new intake. Married couple John and Amanda Leyden have taught at the school for more than 40 years, and live on the grounds; they are now contemplating retirement, though neither can imagine what else they might do with their time. Some children, new to boarding, experience homesickness. John teaches rock and pop hits to the school band in its graffiti-decorated rehearsal room/clubhouse. A new girl, Florrie, stirs some ill feeling when she commits to the band but then fails to show up for practice sessions. Headmaster Dermot Dix, who was himself educated at Headfort, encourages a reluctant class to discuss gay marriage. Amanda uses Enid Blyton's Famous Five books to encourage reluctant readers, and works on the end-of-term play. Older children prepare to move on to new schools, and are emotional at leaving Headfort. One boy fulfils his ambition of getting into Harrow, and phones his parents to share the news. The teachers gather to discuss the prospects of different children moving on to new lives elsewhere.

The Snowman

Director: Tomas Alfredson
Certificate 15 119m 18s

Reviewed by Tim Hayes

It would be nice to report that the bad vibes swirling around *The Snowman* are a misreading of a film's quirky ambitions, but in this case something does seem to have gone wrong in the kitchen. Based on one of Jo Nesbø's novels about self-destructive Oslo detective Harry Hole, it swims in Scandi-*noir* waters that have seeped deep enough into the cultural conversation for the arrival of multiple misogynists with Nordic accents to provoke a weary sigh rather than any intended inspection of one's own fragile morals. Meanwhile the casting of the film borders on the baroque, ambitious with a dash of lunacy, partly no doubt down to the chance of working with Tomas Alfredson after his two stylishly chilly thrillers *Let the Right One In* (2008) and *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (2011), plus a script co-written by *Tinker*'s Peter Straughan. But whatever shot and reshot raw material went into the editing suite, what has emerged is a thriller that never gets around to doing any thrilling.

Harry manages to fit some police work into a cycle of waking up on a park bench and going to sleep pickled in the gutter, a routine that rather suits Michael Fassbender's masochistic side, though Harry is a traditional screen boozer and stays beautiful, untroubled by the blasted blood vessels and miserable skin that the sauce actually entails. He also manages to keep all his friends, including ex-wife Rakel (Charlotte Gainsbourg) and boss Gunnar (Ronan Vibert), both cutting him a mile of slack without which the plot would stall. Tasked with a missing-persons case that turns out to be the work of a serial killer, a new concept for the Oslo fuzz, Harry and partner Katrine (Rebecca Ferguson) find that the victims are all women who have had abortions or children out of wedlock, killed by a man with an inflexible view of the ideal mother.

The snowy landscapes are strikingly shot by Dion Beebe, Marco Beltrami's score knows that the correct musical tool here is Jerry Goldsmith

Carry on Norse: Rebecca Ferguson

strings, and both Fassbender and Ferguson can do this stuff falling off a fjord. But transgender woman Jamie Clayton from TV's *Sense8* is reduced to brief exposition duties, raising the old dilemma about whether diversity of casting in tiny parts is counted a success or a failure, while the pairing of Val Kilmer and Toby Jones as Bergen detectives on a previous case is simply bonkers. Kilmer's scenes are edited so obliquely that you hardly see him speak, a suitably dour production anecdote no doubt lurking in there somewhere. What to make of a film that introduces Chloë Sevigny happily beheading chickens with an axe, has her beheaded herself straight away by the killer, and then immediately produces a twin sister to deliver a single item of exposition before never being seen again? Casting Sevigny for a mere cameo is already woolly thinking; going to the trouble of having her play a pair of inconsequential characters two minutes apart is a plan that's going to look rubbish in the morning.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Tim Bevan
Eric Fellner
Piodor Gustafsson
Robyn Slovo
Screenplay
Peter Straughan
Hossein Amini
Søren Sveistrup
Based on the novel by Jo Nesbø
Director of Photography
Dion Beebe
Edited by
Thelma Schoonmaker
Claire Simpson
Production Designer
Maria Djurkovic
Music
Marco Beltrami
Sound Recordist
Martin Trevis
Costume Designer
Julian Day

Production Companies
Universal Pictures presents in association with Perfect World Pictures a Working Title production
In association with Another Park Film
A Tomas Alfredson film
Executive Producers
Martin Scorsese
Tomas Alfredson
Amelia Granger
Liza Chasin
Emma Tillinger Koskoff

Cast
Michael Fassbender
Detective Harry Hole
Rebecca Ferguson
Katrine Bratt
Charlotte Gainsbourg
Rakel
Chloë Sevigny
Sylvia/Ann Ottersen
Val Kilmer
Gert Rafto
J.K. Simmons
Arve Stop

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

Norway, the recent past. A young boy and his mother are subjected to domestic abuse by a policeman, apparently the boy's father. The woman later commits suicide in front of her son.

Some years later, Oslo detective Harry Hole is an alcoholic, trying to stay on good terms with ex-wife Rakel, her new partner Mathias and Oleg, her son from an earlier marriage. Harry and fellow officer Katrine investigate a missing-persons case: a mother who has vanished from her home. The kidnapper leaves a snowman at the scene and writes a taunting letter to Harry.

The trail leads to a murder case nine years previously in Bergen, investigated at the time by officer Rafto, who was later found dead. Other cases of missing women convince Harry that the kidnapper is a serial killer targeting mothers who have, in the killer's eyes, failed their children. Evidence implicates a doctor, Vetlesen, and bodies of women are found at his house after he apparently kills himself. But Harry believes the killer is still at large. He discovers that Katrine is Rafto's daughter and suspects that she is involved, until she is herself attacked. The killer is in fact Mathias, the young boy from the opening flashback. He menaces Rakel and Oleg, but after a struggle with Harry he falls through the ice on a frozen lake. Harry takes on another unusual murder case.

Strangled

Hungary 2016
Director: Árpád Sopsits
Certificate 18 120m 56s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

In *Abandoned* (2001), Hungarian writer-director Arpád Sopsits drew partly on his own experience to show a child plunged into a hell of despair: a young boy, Aron, enjoys a happy childhood until his mother becomes ill and his father consigns him to a nightmarish Dickensian orphanage. Besides depicting the specific reality of this cruel institution, Sopsits effectively used it as an allegory of post-1956 Hungary, when the failed uprising was punished by years of a repressive totalitarian regime that only gradually eased its grip.

In *Strangled*, Sopsits once more draws on reality to suggest a wider political landscape. In the post-uprising years of the 1950s and 1960s, a notorious series of brutal sex killings took place in the small industrial town of Martfü, where most of the population worked in the local Bata shoe factory. (The film's Hungarian title, *A Martfüi rém*, translates as 'The Monster of Martfü'.) A man was jailed for the first of them, but it gradually became apparent that he'd been wrongfully convicted. The communist authorities, though, strongly resisted any such suggestion, refusing to acknowledge that the crimes were linked. Only when the evidence became overwhelming were they forced to concede that all the attacks, including the first, were the work of one individual.

There's a parallel here with the Chikatilo killings, perpetrated in the USSR between 1978 and 1990 by an ex-teacher, Andrei Chikatilo, who mutilated and murdered some 50 young women and children. There, too, since the authorities refused to accept that so decadent a creature as a serial killer could exist in their ideal society and insisted the murders were unconnected, the police investigation was constantly hampered and obstructed. In *Strangled*, as the attacks and murders mount up, the secretary of the country's socialist party angrily asserts: "There are no serial killers in this country! Is that clear?" A key difference between the two examples, though, is that where the Chikatilo killings inspired a stolid HBO movie, *Citizen X* (1995), and a trashy cinematic outing, *Evilenko* (2004), Sopsits has used the Martfü attacks as the basis for an intense, unsettling film that compels our attention.

The film is shot in and around Martfü itself, on the Alföld, the Great Hungarian Plain, with Sopsits's DP Gábor Szabó deploying a dark, oppressive palette that evokes the era no less than the sense of helpless dread suffusing the town (all the attacks occur at night). Sopsits starts out in what at first might be standard police-procedural mode, but gradually expands the implications of his story, opening it up to political crosswinds and evoking a society where everyone is glancing over his or her shoulder – for informers perhaps even more than for killers. "No one will congratulate you if the truth gets out," saturnine police inspector Bóta (Zsolt Anger) warns eager young junior prosecutor Szirmai (Péter Bárnai), who's pushing to have the original murder case reopened: "I've got to report on you," he adds balefully. This is a regime bent on proving the power of its own grip, 'the force of law and order' in the aftermath of the defeated uprising. People check for hidden microphones almost as a reflex action; and when Bóta himself starts to express doubts, his superior threatens him with having his "1956 records" re-examined.

Hungary ghosts: Dóra Sztarenki

In a society so pervaded by paranoia and guilt, the action of the wretched Akos Réti (Gábor Jászberényi) in confessing to the original killing comes to seem near-logical; he'd contemplated poisoning Erzsébet Patai (Anna Mészöly), his ex-girlfriend, and so his conviction and imprisonment were no more than "God's rightful punishment on me". And when the real killer finally confesses, he almost contrives to present himself as the victim: Erzsébet, he tells the police with an insinuating smile, was a "hot woman" who'd laughed at him when he couldn't get an erection, and so he'd killed her. But killing her, he found, got him hard, a discovery that inspired his subsequent exploits.

It's an unpleasant story, told unblinkingly. Sopsits makes no attempt to soften it at the end: even if the true killer has been brought to justice, Réti, we're told, was "found not guilty but never rehabilitated", and Szirmai pays the price for his search for truth. And while all this is being told, there's an ironic final note: in the background, a TV commentator hails the return of "our heroic troops". It's 1968, and they've been helping to suppress another uprising – in Prague this time.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Gabor Ferenczy
Attila Tozsér
Written by
Árpád Sopsits
Dramaturgy
András Szeredás
Director of Photography
Gábor Szabó
Editor
Zoltán Kovács
Production Design
Rita Dévényi
Árpád Sopsits
Music
Márk Moldvai
Sound
Attila Tózsér
Gábor Császár
Costume Designer
Györgyi Szakács

Production Companies
FocusFox presents
with support from
Magyar Nemzeti Filmalap a film by
Árpád Sopsits
Executive Producers
András Tóth
Mihály Korom

Cast
Károly Hajduk
Bognár Pál
Gábor Jászberényi
Ákos Réti
Zsolt Anger
Bóta, detective
Péter Bárnai
Zoltán Szirmai
Zsolt Trill
Katona Gábor, prosecutor
Zsófia Szamosi
Rita
Mónika Balsai
Szigeti Nóra, Bognár's wife
András Réthelyi
Juhász
Piroska Móga
Marika
Valentin Venczel
Rostás
Dóra Sztarenki
Ági
Anna Mészöly
Erzsébet Patai
Eszter Csépai
Ibolya Sóskuti

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Eureka Entertainment

Hungarian theatrical title
A martfüi rém

Martfü, Hungary, 1957. Akos Réti, a worker at the town's shoe factory, meets ex-girlfriend Erzsébet Patai and begs her to get back together with him. When she refuses, he hits her. Later, her raped, strangled body is found in a canal. Réti, arrested by inspectors Katona and Bóta, confesses to the crime and, despite the protests of his sister Rita, is sentenced to death – later commuted to 25 years in jail.

In 1964, another young woman, Ibolya Sóskuti, is similarly killed. A third young woman, Agnes Köves, is also attacked but survives. An ambitious young prosecutor, Zoltán Szirmai, is brought in; to Bóta's annoyance, he suggests that Réti was wrongly convicted and that all three attacks are linked. Nóra, wife of truck driver Pál Bognár, is attacked but escapes. Her attacker was Bognár, who failed to recognise her, as she was wearing a red wig. Szirmai tries to have the Réti case reopened but is blocked by his superiors.

In 1966, schoolgirl Evi begs a lift from Bognár. He strangles her and rapes her dead body. Rita urges her brother to appeal; when Katona, now senior prosecutor, blocks his appeal, Réti cuts his wrist, but his cellmate finds him in time. Bóta starts to suspect that Szirmai is right, but his superiors warn him off. Bognár kills and rapes another factory worker, Magda Szegedi. When he has sex with Nóra, she recognises the breathing of the man who attacked her and tells Szirmai. Bognár is arrested.

In 1968, Réti is released, Bognár is hanged, Katona demoted and Bóta pensioned off. Szirmai is knocked off his bike and killed by a black limousine.

Suburbicon

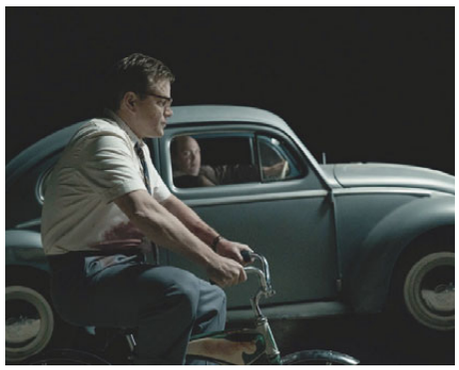
USA 2007
Director: George Clooney
Certificate 15 104m 17s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

"We can solve a housing problem or we can try to solve a racial problem. But we can't combine the two." William Levitt, creator of the famous Levittown suburbs, was famously unabashed about his developments' whites-only policies.

George Clooney's sly, energetic and blood-soaked 1950s comedy takes aim squarely at this post-war bigotry. At its opening, the Meyerses, a black family moving into a neat, all-white suburb, find their neighbourhood in uproar, with the residents staging escalating protests against them. But this is only half the story, since the film rapidly pivots to an *In Cold Blood*-style home invasion next door, which leaves ten-year-old Nicky Lodge motherless and in the care of his ultra-respectable father Gardner and flirtatious aunt Margaret. The Meyers family's ordeal, which builds over weeks to a terrifying state of siege, is less a story than a compare-and-contrast exercise with the increasingly dark deeds going on behind the Lodges' picket fence. Working with his long-time co-writer Grant Heslov, Clooney has wound a strand of black fortitude against white racism into a long-unproduced and bluffly cynical Coen brothers script about suburban murder. Despite the film's high style and energy, and the Meyerses' story's roots in reality (a violent riot erupted over a black family's move to Levittown in 1957), the two sit oddly together, the joins clearly visible.

Clooney is best known, when he's directing, for thoughtful, principled dramas such as *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005); his comedies have been more uneven. As *Leatherheads* (2008) wobbled between farce and romcom, so *Suburbicon* veers between sharp terror and gory glee. You can feel it strain at times for enough laughs to power a comedy-thriller. Granted, it spanks along, and boasts fine central performances. Matt Damon's weak, upright Gardner plays nicely with the actor's decent, have-a-go screen persona. Julianne Moore's Margaret (she's also her twin sister, the early-despatched Rose) is a smart study in



Bourne yesterday: Matt Damon

fluttery, selfish desperation. Best of all is Noah Jupe's watchful, nosy Nicky. The film adopts his puzzled POV to spy on the household's spiral into deceit and murder. Early on, his bewilderment at the adults' behaviour ratchets up the suspense, and twists the plot pleasingly. But as the narrative whips itself into a frenzy of blackmail and betrayal, we care less and less about the caricature baddies squabbling and being swiftly finished off. Even Oscar Isaac's flashily corrupt insurance investigator feels overdone.

An almost parodic attention to 50s visual styling combines with Alexandre Desplat's Herrmannesque score to up the feeling of unreality, though cinematographer Robert Elswit frames sequences with nimble wit. The film is too heavy-handed to pull off its black comedy with *Fargo*-style élan, but a more serious shortcoming is its failure to explore the Meyers family's experience from the inside, or give the actors playing them – Karimah Westbrook, Leith Burke and Tony Espinosa – anything interesting to do. Only ever seen as a stoical trio withstanding howling racism with quiet dignity, they link the film to contemporary white supremacist protests such as Charlottesville. Keen to highlight America's enduring racism, the film seems less conscious of its own inequalities.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Grant Heslov
George Clooney
Teddy Schwarzman
Written by
Joel Coen
Ethan Coen
George Clooney
Grant Heslov
Director of Photography
Robert Elswit
Edited by
Stephen Mirrione
Production Designer
James D. Bissell
Music
Alexandre Desplat
Sound Mixer
Edward Tise
Costume Designer
Jenny Eagen

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Production Companies
Black Bear Pictures presents
Bloom presents
a Dark Castle Entertainment production
A Smokehouse Pictures production
Executive Producers
Joel Silver
Hal Sadoff
Ethan Erwin
Barbara A. Hall
Daniel Steinman

Cast

Matt Damon
Gardner Lodge
Julianne Moore
Rose Lodge/Margaret
Noah Jupe
Nicky Lodge
Glenn Fleshler
Ira
Alex Hassell
Louis
Gary Basaraba
Uncle Mitch
Oscar Isaac
Bud Cooper
Jack Conley
Hightower
Karimah Westbrook
Mrs Meyers
Tony Espinosa
Andy Meyers
Leith Burke
Mr Meyers

In Colour
2.35:1 [Panavision]

Distributor
E1 Films

Suburban America, the late 1950s. The Meyerses, a black family, move into an all-white suburb whose residents begin an escalating front-yard protest against them. Their wheelchair-bound neighbour Rose dies when thugs Ira and Louis etherise her and her family during a robbery. Rose's son Nicky grows suspicious when his father Gardner and aunt Margaret fail to identify the thugs in a police line-up. His uncle Mitch is also suspicious. Ira tries to blackmail Gardner, who has gambling debts. Insurance investigator Bud tells Margaret he suspects that she and Gardner arranged Rose's killing after a staged car crash only disabled her. A huge crowd riots outside the Meyers family's house. Bud offers to approve Rose's life insurance claim if Gardner pays everything to him. Margaret poisons Bud with lye-laced coffee, then Gardner bludgeons him to death and drives the body away. Ira has sent Louis to kill Margaret and Nicky. Nicky secretly sees Margaret poisoning his sandwich and milk; he calls Mitch. Louis breaks in and strangles Margaret, but is killed by Mitch while trying to grab Nicky. Mitch dies of knife wounds. Gardner buries Bud. He is chased by Ira, who is killed by a speeding bus. Back home, Gardner threatens to kill Nicky, then tries to coerce him into colluding with him. He eats Nicky's sandwich and dies. Nicky goes outside to play ball with his friend Andy Meyers.

Thor Ragnarok

USA 2017
Director: Taika Waititi
Certificate 12A 130m 21s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Thor and the Hulk are, literally, the heaviest hitters in the Marvel Universe, but their solo films haven't quite matched the stronger Iron Man or Captain America entries – so far, both have been best served when included in the assembly of Joss Whedon's Avengers.

Thor: The Dark World (2013), a troubled production, made the prospect of another sequel iffy, but this more engaging effort is crafted along the lines of Shane Black's franchise rescue operation *Iron Man 3* (2013). In plot terms, this means another arrogant good guy has his home destroyed and is flung far from most of his supporting cast to rebuild a streamlined heroic identity, while by-play with a comic villain (here, Jeff Goldblum's amusingly mild-mannered tyrant the Grandmaster) fills in between first- and last-act confrontations with a serious menace. In creative terms, it involves hiring unexpected talent to put the whole thing together, with New Zealand writer-performer-director Taika Waititi (*What We Do in the Shadows*, *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* and *Boy* – see page 59) the latest quirky indie creative to win a golden ticket to a big-budget tentpole movie.

As ever, upfront credit is given to Stan Lee, Larry Lieber and Jack Kirby for creating the Thor comics, but significant special mention is earned by Walt Simonson, Greg Pak and Carlo Pagulayan. Writer-artist Simonson's well-regarded 1980s Thor run is referenced throughout, from a throwaway line about the thunder god once being turned into a frog to a concise adaptation of a subplot in which Skurge, hitherto a cardboard villain, emerges as a tragic antihero with a magnificent exit scene (perfectly played by Karl Urban). Pak and Pagulayan wrote and drew the 2006 *Planet Hulk*, which is retooled here as a co-starring vehicle for Thor (replacing the Silver Surfer from the comic and Simonson's alternate Thor creation Beta Ray Bill from the 2010 animated *Planet Hulk* film) and the Hulk in between battles with Thor's witchy elder sister Hela – Cate Blanchett carrying off one of Jack Kirby's extreme helmet designs. *Ragnarok* borrows *Planet Hulk*'s knowing riff on the alien-arena theme, which is associated in comics and film with Flash Gordon (Superman went there too in the 'Warworld' storyline) but which derives – ironically, considering that this is a Disney release – from Edgar Rice Burroughs's Mars books. The spectre of the unjustly maligned *John Carter*, Disney's 2012 stab at Burroughs, lingers in brawl sequences, which are staged with brio – and *Guardians of the Galaxy* rock accompaniment – but still feel like rote genre requirements until lightning is called down for an exciting, epic finale.

Marvel edged ahead of the Distinguished Competition in the 1960s by adding what were then unusual elements to superheroic battles – soap opera, cosmic weirdness and humour. All three are represented here. The circular trust-betrayal relationship of Thor and Loki edges out traditional romance ("Sorry Jane dumped you," says a New Yorker grabbing a selfie with the god), and yet again father issues dominate (Hela is ticked off, like Loki before her, by Odin's self-indulgent tendency to pamper his favoured heroic son after their ignoble deeds have secured his throne). Even more than the *Guardians* films, this has the crowded, colourful, double-page-spread look of

Asgardian soulmates: Hemsworth, Hiddleston

classic Marvel (Thor was Kirby's favourite space-opera stage), with much eye-pleasing detail. And, after the introspective gloom of recent Avengers and Captain America entries, *Ragnarok* lets the cast have fun: Chris Hemsworth is an amusing faux-dumb Thor, good-natured even when facing a charging Hulk ("I know him – he's a friend from work!"); Tom Hiddleston and Benedict Cumberbatch match supercilious putdowns as Loki is ensorcelled by Doctor Strange; Waititi himself voices an amiable, scene-stealing rock monster; and Mark Ruffalo is endearing as a petty, big-kid Hulk and a befuddled Bruce Banner.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Kevin Feige
Written by
Eric Pearson
Craig Kyle
Christopher L. Yost
Director of Photography
Javier Aguirresarobe
Edited by
Joel Negron
Zene Baker
Production Designers
Dan Hennah
Ra Vincent
Music
Mark Mothersbaugh
Supervising Sound Editors
Shannon Mills
Daniel Laurie
Costume Designer
Mayes C. Rubeo
Stunt Co-ordinator
Kyle Gardiner
Visual Effects and Animation
Industrial Light & Magic
Framestore
Method Studios Vancouver
Digital Domain
Whiskytree Inc
Fin Design + Effects
Visual Effects
Rising Sun Pictures
Luma Pictures
D Negative
Iloura
Image Engine
Trixter
The Secret Lab
Technicolor VFX
Rodeo FX

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Production Companies
Marvel Studios presents
Distributed by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures
Executive Producers
Louis D'Esposito
Victoria Alonso
Brad Winderbaum
Thomas M. Hammel
Stan Lee

Cast
Chris Hemsworth
Thor
Tom Hiddleston
Loki
Cate Blanchett
Hela
Idris Elba
Heimdall
Jeff Goldblum
Grandmaster
Tessa Thompson
Valkyrie
Karl Urban
Skurge
Mark Ruffalo
Bruce Banner, 'Hulk'
Anthony Hopkins
Odin, King of Asgard
Benedict Cumberbatch
Doctor Strange
Taika Waititi
Korg

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]
IMAX prints:
[2.35:1] and [1.9:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Buena Vista International (UK)

Norse god Thor averts Ragnarok, the prophesied destruction of the realm of Asgard, by seizing the helmet of fire giant Surtur. With the help of sorcerer Doctor Strange, Thor and his adoptive brother Loki find their dying father Odin, who admits that Thor's hitherto unmentioned sister Hela, goddess of death, will return. Hela casts the brothers across the universe and lays waste to Asgard. Thor is captured by Valkyrie, sole survivor of a previous battle with Hela, and sold to the Grandmaster, who stages gladiatorial contests on the planet Sakaar. Thor battles the arena's champion – the Hulk. He persuades Valkyrie, Loki and the Hulk's alter ego Bruce Banner to overthrow the Grandmaster and travel through a wormhole to Asgard. Evacuating the surviving Asgardians, Thor turns the battle by restoring Surtur's helmet. The giant brings about Ragnarok and defeats Hela. The refugee Asgardians head for Earth.

Trophy

USA/Qatar/United Kingdom 2017
Director: Shaul Schwarz

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Two years ago, a Minnesota dentist called Walter Palmer became the most hated man in the world after killing a lion called Cecil (named after Cecil Rhodes) in Zimbabwe. We see some of the furious demos against him during the course of Shaul Schwarz and Christina Clusiau's documentary. Their film starts, though, with a man who appears to be Palmer's soul brother: Philip Glass (not the composer), a Texan, showing his eight-year-old son how to shoot his first deer. He seems set up to be the film's prime hate figure, gloating over the prospect of bagging his 'Big Five' in Africa (elephant, buffalo, lion, leopard, rhino) and proclaiming, on the authority of the Bible, that "God gave Man dominion over animals" and that he's therefore fully entitled to kill them. (He further adds that anyone who believes in evolution is an idiot.)

However, *Trophy* takes a more nuanced attitude to big-game hunting than one might expect. Schwarz, an Israeli who knew nothing of hunting, admits that he was initially repelled by the idea of killing animals for the satisfaction of it. Clusiau, who grew up in Minnesota, where hunting is embedded in the local culture, persuaded him there might be another side to the argument. It's this debate that the film explores.

Central to the pro-hunting case is the several-times reiterated slogan, 'If it pays, it stays' – ie, if people will pay to hunt an animal, the species will be preserved because it brings in cash. While that line is perhaps only to be expected from someone like South African Christo Gomes, who makes a plush living running a safari company much patronised by gun-toting Americans, it's also supported – if ruefully – by Zimbabwean wildlife officer Chris Moore, whose expeditions against poachers are largely funded by the fat fees paid by those same trophy hunters.

Yet more eloquent is John Hume, who runs what's claimed to be the world's biggest rhino ranch and whose affection for his animals is

Horn trader: John Hume

evident. Rhino horn, deludedly believed (mainly in China and adjacent Asian countries) to have medicinal properties, sells for more than gold, and is therefore much coveted by poachers. To deter them, Hume de-horns his rhinos and is sitting on a £50m hoard, but under South African law isn't allowed to sell it. If he were allowed to, he points out, he could protect even more of the animals. Against this, Will Travers of the Born Free Foundation (whom we see publicly debating Hume in London) maintains that legalising the market will simply cause it to expand, encouraging yet more poaching.

Scenes at the Safari Club International convention in Las Vegas (more macho gun-toters) may well stick in the craw. Yet Hume's distress at seeing a baby rhino wandering around bleating pathetically after its mother has been slaughtered by poachers, or African villagers' anger after an elephant (which they're not allowed to kill) has trampled their crops and destroyed their huts, suggest there are sides to the debate that at least deserve consideration. End titles reveal that Hume got the South African government ban overturned. Should we feel indignant – or pleased? *Trophy* presents the arguments, but leaves us to decide.

Credits and Synopsis

Co-director
Christina Clusiau
Producers
Lauren Haber
Julia Nottingham
Cinematographers
Shaul Schwarz
Christine Clusiau
Editors
Halil Efrat
Jay Arthur Sterrenberg
Original Music
Jeremy Turner
Erick Lee
Sound Recordist
Juan Bertrán

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Production Companies
Impact Partners, Pulse Films, Reel Peak Films, The Long Run present in association with
19340 Productions, BBC Storyville, Chicago Media Project, Candescent Films, Influence Film
Supported by Bertha Britdoc, Doha Film Institute, Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program
A film by Shaul Schwarz
Made with the generous support of Impact Partners
Recipient of a post-production grant from Doha Film Institute
Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program with support from Ford Foundation Justfilms
Supported by Yesdocu
Executive Producers
Dan Cogan
Thomas Benski
Lucas Ochoa
Lars Knudsen
Tom Hardy
Maxyne Franklin
Kate Townsend
Sharon Chang
Lilly Hartley
Jeffrey Tarrant

In Colour

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

A documentary on the relationship between big-game hunting and wildlife conservation in Africa. We meet Texan sheep-breeder Philip Glass, set on bagging the 'Big Five' (elephant, buffalo, lion, leopard, rhino); Chris Moore, a wildlife officer in Zimbabwe whose anti-poaching campaign is partially financed by fees paid by trophy hunters; Christo Gomes, who owns a major safari company in South Africa and breeds animals to be shot by clients; and John Hume, owner of Buffalo Dream Ranch and the world's largest breeder of rhinos, who trims his rhinos' horns to make them unattractive to poachers. We also encounter Craig Packer, a professor of ecology at the University of Minnesota, who formerly ran the Serengeti Lion Project; and Will Travers and Adam Roberts of the Born Free Foundation, passionate opponents of trophy killing.

Hume is taking the South African government to court to lift its moratorium on the rhino-horn trade. He has five tons of rhino horn stockpiled and argues that only by selling it can he finance his breeding project. He also comes to London to debate publicly with Travers. Glass, a lifelong hunter, considers himself a conservationist, claiming that the fees he pays help to conserve wild animals. Moore and his wardens interrogate the family of a suspected poacher. Gomes insists that by breeding animals to be shot he's preserving the species. Glass bags a lion, the fourth of his 'Big Five'.

End titles tells us that Hume won his case against the South African government and can now sell his rhino horn.

Wet Woman in the Wind

Japan 2016
Director: Shiota Akihiko

Reviewed by Jasper Sharp

Wet Woman in the Wind is one of five new works commissioned as part of Nikkatsu's Roman Porno Reboot project. Like the others in the series – Yukisada Isao's *Aroused by Gymnopedies*, Nakahata Hideo's *White Lily*, Shiraishi Kazuya's *Dawn of the Felines* and Sono Sion's *Antiporno* (reviewed on p. 56 in this issue) – it harks back nostalgically to the line of glossy softcore sex movies launched by Japan's oldest film company at the tail end of 1971 in an attempt to stave off the box-office doldrums then besetting all the country's major studios. The original Roman Porno series resulted in a staggering output of almost 1,000 titles, produced at a conveyor-belt rate to play on triple bills across the nation's screens, and it yielded more than a few classics before decadence and creative lassitude crept in and the plug was finally pulled in 1988.

This is not the first attempt by Nikkatsu (itself effectively a rebooted version of the studio it once was, having risen from the ashes of its 1993 bankruptcy and resumed production at a vastly reduced rate in 1996) to recapture the magic of its celebrated heyday of large-screen eroticism. A previous revival in 2010, consisting of Roman Porno veteran Nakahara Shun's remake of the title that set the ball rolling, *Apartment Wife: Affair in the Afternoon* (1971), and newcomer Masumoto Shoichiro's reworking of Ohara Koyu's *From the Back or from the Front* (1980), passed by virtually unnoticed both at home and abroad.

Nikkatsu has upped the ante this time around, with its five featured directors all significant names in contemporary Japanese filmmaking. Several of them began their careers with adult material, notably Nakata, who started out as an assistant at Nikkatsu in the late 1980s before his *Ringu* (1998) spearheaded the global phenomenon of J-horror. Shiota Akihiko, the director of this particular entry, received his first credit AD-ing on Kurosawa Kiyoshi's unorthodox debut *Kandagawa Pervert Wars* (1983), made for the low-budget independent adult sector known as *pinku eiga*, or 'pink film' (with which Roman Porno is often mistakenly conflated), and began his commercial directing career with the straight-to-video *The Nude Woman* (1996). Early features, including two discomfitingly clinical looks at the sexuality and sexualisation of adolescent protagonists, *Moonlight Whispers* (1999) and *Harmful Insect* (2001), paved the way for the considerable box-office hits of supernatural romance *Yomigaeri* (2002) and period fantasy *Dororo* (2007), adapted from Tezuka Osamu's famous manga series.

The title alone of *Wet Woman in the Wind*, which Shiota also scripted, signals its intention as a tongue-in-cheek homage to one of the most regarded talents to emerge from the original Roman Porno line, Kumashiro Tatsumi, whose works include such titles as *Wet Lips* (1972) and *Lovers Are Wet* (1973). The premise – the arrival of a mysterious beauty throws the protagonist's life into chaos with her insatiable sexual appetite – echoes that of Kumashiro's *The Woman with Red Hair* (1979).

That Shiota's playful portrayal of the multifarious sexual shenanigans is essentially a pastiche might be lost on viewers unfamiliar with these points of reference. The titular wet woman here adopts a violently assertive approach to breaking down the resolve of her target – a philandering playwright who has retreated from the carnality of Tokyo life to lead an off-grid existence and focus on his work – which frequently teeters over into absurdity. Their first encounter, where she peels off her sodden T-shirt after bizarrely tumbling on her bicycle into the waters beneath the dock where Kosuke is contemplating his existence, eventually leads to a crescendo of copulation that quite literally brings the house down.

It's an entertaining romp, although as an attempt at reliving the watershed moment when Nikkatsu almost single-handedly thrust eroticism into the Japanese mainstream some 45 years ago, it feels slight. Considering the glut of similar fare to follow, one might wonder about the relevance of this project to contemporary audiences with a wealth of similar material readily at hand in these days of cable, home-video and internet smut. S

Softcore curriculum: Tasuku Nagaoka, Yuki Mamiya

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Komuro Naoko
Masuda Shinichiro
Takahashi Masahiko
Written by
Shiota Akihiko
Director of Photography
Shinomiya Hidetoshi
Editor
Sato Takashi
Music
Kida Shunsuke

Production Companies
Nikkatsu Corporation, SKY Perfect JSAT Corporation, Django Film Production

Cast
Mamiya Yuki
Shiori
Nagaoka Tasuku
Takasuke Kosuke
Tei Ryushin
Suzuki Michiko
Nakatani Hitomi
Kato Takahiro

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributors
MUBI
ICA

Japanese theatrical title
Kaze ni nureta onna

Japan, present day. A mysterious young woman stumbles into the life of playwright Kosuke after cycling into the sea at the harbour where he is sitting quietly reading a book. Soaking wet, she forcefully invites herself back to the woodland shack where he lives in self-imposed isolation. He rejects her persistent requests to spend the night with him, and she leaves. The next day, at the local coffee shop, Kosuke and his friend Yuzawa find the woman waitressing there. Her name is Shiori. While they drink their coffee, Shiori has rough sex in the back room of the café with owner Kubouchi, whose wife Tamaki has recently left him.

Over the following days, Shiori returns to Kosuke's home to taunt him sexually. Kubouchi arrives on Kosuke's doorstep and attacks him, accusing him of affairs with both Shiori and Tamaki. Yuzawa tells Kosuke that Shiori has left Kubouchi hospitalised after their relationship became increasingly tempestuous. They visit him, and Kubouchi forgives Kosuke, offering him the keys to the flat above his café as an apology for his previous violence.

Kosuke returns home to find his former lover, theatre director Kyoko, camped outside his home, having just arrived from Tokyo with a troupe of four male actors and her mousy assistant Yuko. That night, Kyoko forces herself on Kosuke and they begin to make love, but Shiori enters Kosuke's bedroom and joins in the tryst, forcing him out. Kosuke goes outside and seduces Yuko. Next morning, everyone has vanished except Yuko, whom Kosuke sends away. Shiori reappears. She and Kosuke make love until his shack collapses, so they move to Kubouchi's flat to continue. Yuko encounters Yuzawa on the road and they have sex. Next day, Kosuke awakens to find that Shiori has vanished. Yuko and Yuzawa hear a radio report that an escaped tiger from a local zoo has been recaptured. Kosuke returns to his dilapidated hut.

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Home cinema

Soul survivor: Candace Hilligoss as Mary Henry, seemingly recalled to life in Herk Harvey's classic low-budget horror film

MYSTERIES OF THE ORGANIST

Herk Harvey emerged from the shadowy world of instructional films to make a haunting classic of life after life

CARNIVAL OF SOULS

Herk Harvey; US 1962; Criterion/Region B Blu-ray; 78 minutes; 1.37:1. Features: selected-scene audio commentary featuring Harvey and screenwriter John Clifford; interview with comedian and writer Dana Gould; new video essay by critic David Cairns; *The Movie That Wouldn't Die!*, a documentary on the 1989 reunion of the film's cast and crew; *The Carnival Tour*, a 2000 update on the film's locations; excerpts from movies made by the Centron Corporation, an industrial film company based in Lawrence, Kansas, that once employed Harvey and Clifford; deleted scenes; outtakes, accompanied by Gene Moore's organ score; history of the Saltair Resort in Salt Lake City; trailer; essay by writer and programmer Kier-La Janisse.

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Director Herk Harvey is often classed among the cinema's one-hit wonders – *Carnival of Souls* (1962) was his only commercially released fiction feature – but he crafted an enormous amount of work in the shadows beyond the purview of the IMDb, assembling educational, instructional and promotional films to order in Lawrence, Kansas, for a wide range of clients.

Carnival opens with an impromptu drag race between a car full of guys and another driven by a girl with two female friends in the passenger seat, which leads to the women's car plunging off a bridge – all shot with the matter-of-fact tone of a driver safety film, as opposed to the gasoline-and-adrenalin approach of the typical car chase/crash exploitationer of the era. A crowd of poorly post-synched male authority figures gather to mutter disapproval – note the driver of the other car lying about what happened to shift blame away from himself – and muse that the bodies will probably never be found... then, some hours after she went into the water, bedraggled Mary Henry (Candace Hilligoss) emerges on a triangular wedge of mud, apparently recalled to life.

Over the next few days, seemingly numb to the deaths of her friends, Mary drives to a new town to take a position as church organist, which she describes as "just a job". Haunted by glimpses of a ghoul-like figure (Harvey himself), she has dissociational spells where the sounds of the world are muted (a silent pneumatic drill is especially eerie) and shop assistants find her invisible. She moves into a rooming house and is aggressively chatted up by by across-the-hall neighbour John Linden (Sidney Berger), a low-rent Stanley Kowalski whose company she still finds preferable to being alone with ghosts who want her as one of their number. Taking a cue from the protagonist's occupation, there's a near-constant organ score from Gene Moore which might be Mary's inner monologue. When the church's minister (Art Ellison) catches her playing such profane music he

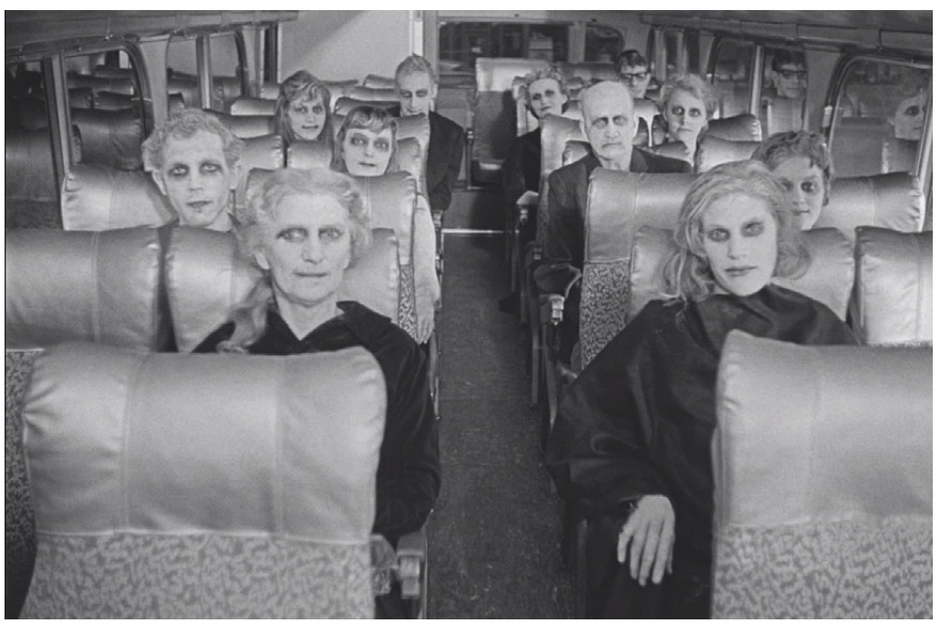
Men condemn Mary as unspiritual, unsexual or neurotic – making atheism, frigidity and insanity seem positive choices

playing such profane music he dismisses her on the spot. Even Mary's psychiatrist (Stan Levitt) is a patronising creep who literally seizes her in the park and drags her to his office, then hides behind a chairback "making notes" solely to set up a later shock as the chair swivels to reveal the crumbling face of 'the Man'.

The once-obscure film has been so influential that few viewers will fail to realise that Mary is dead – though her exact status in the world is ambiguous. Is she having a moment-of-death hallucination (as in *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, 1962), unnaturally alive but stalked by a cheated personified death (as in *Final Destination*, 2000), a ghost who doesn't know she should move on (*The Sixth Sense*, 1999) or a combination of all three (*Jacob's Ladder*, 1990)? She is drawn to an abandoned carnival (Saltair, Utah – the location inspired the film) where the Man and similar spooks dance, lurk in the water and form a harrying mob – evoking the art-film ghosts of *The Seventh Seal* (1957) or *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961). It's a film whose meaning is at once plain and elusive – on this viewing, it struck me that the understandably aggrieved Mary might be well quit of the world. Men condemn her for being unspiritual (the minister), unsexual (the lech) or neurotic (the shrink) in a strident, grab-handed manner that makes atheism, frigidity and insanity seem positive choices. But the pull of the carnival and the increasing activity of the apparitions are still terrifying.

The 4K restoration used for this release banishes memories of blurry dupes – and many dubious budget DVD releases – by presenting the film with a sharpness that means the opening credits, the edges of buildings, the tooling on cars and even Hilligoss's profile cut like knives. It's as dreamlike as earlier editions, but in a different way – and some of the now-perceptible detail (like the flaky pancake makeup of the spectres) emerges thanks to the banishment of a murk which Harvey took advantage of if he didn't actively create. It's worth hanging on to the better DVD releases – Criterion's earlier R1 two-disc set and a UK R2 from Network (full disclosure: Stephen Jones and I did a commentary track for this) – because the restoration is of the original 1962 theatrical release (78m), which was trimmed by distributor Herts-Lion to fit on a double bill, and not the 87-minute 1990 rerelease preferred by the director. Since 1990, the longer cut has been accepted as the definitive *Carnival of Souls*, though this may now change. The Criterion DVD included both versions, but this Blu-ray represents the director's cut with a selection of 'deleted scenes' (though not all of the missing material – many of the trims were shots of only a few seconds). Arguably, some of the distributor cuts heighten the weirdness, by removing clunky devices such as other characters commenting on the heroine's lack of emotion or over-literal lines like "I don't belong in the world, something separates me from other people." Still, it would have been nice to have the choice.

Other extras are carried over from the DVD: a documentary about "the movie that wouldn't die", a patchwork commentary by Harvey and screenwriter John Clifford, and a substantial look at the industrial films Harvey made for his own Centron Productions. New to this release are a vintage TV programme about the decaying Saltair carnival site, a talk by comedian-writer Dana Gould – the only person on this disc who refers, if obliquely, to Adam Grossman and Ian Kessner's 1998 remake, distributed as *Wes Craven Presents Carnival of Souls* – and an audiovisual essay by David Cairns which includes eerily phoned-in comments from artist Stephen R. Bissette and critic Anne Billson. S



Ghost riders: *Carnival of Souls* is a film whose meaning is at once plain and elusive

New releases

THE CHASE

Arthur Penn; US 1966; Powerhouse/Indicator/Region-free Blu-ray and DVD dual format; Certificate 15; 134 minutes; 2.35:1. Features: audio commentary by historians Lem Dobbs, Nick Redman and Julie Kirgo; 1996 Arthur Penn interview; new Matthew Penn interview; James Fox in conversation with Richard Ayoade; 8mm abridged version; isolated John Barry score; trailer and gallery; booklet notes by Christina Newland.

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The critical reputation of this fractious 60s Texas melodrama has hardly been helped by director Arthur Penn essentially disowning the final product. Producer Sam Spiegel, having decamped in the late 50s to Britain and David Lean with notable success, was determined to keep a firm grip on his would-be glorious return to Hollywood, editing the footage while Penn was away directing *Wait Until Dark* on Broadway, reportedly ruining the scenes' intended internal rhythms and leaving much of Marlon Brando's best work on the cutting-room floor. However, if the end result doesn't necessarily realise the fine details of Penn's ambition, thematically it does fit snugly into his filmography between the existential *noir* of the preceding *Mickey One* (1965) and the ferocious anti-establishment counter-blast of *Bonnie & Clyde* (1967). Here's another film about the clash between ownership and personal integrity fuelling volatile class and ethnic tensions, exploding in a fiery climax whose obvious studio settings transmute headline-grabbing social relevance into a strangely dreamlike fresco.

Adapted from a Horton Foote play by Lillian Hellman (no less), it comes over like the high-end soaps Hollywood had been shaping from Tennessee Williams and Faulkner around the start of the decade, but with post-JFK disillusion now bringing a shaper edge to the telling. Still, for all the title's promise of urgent pursuit, there's not much chasing going on, escaped prisoner Robert Redford – in the early days, when his good looks played against somewhat shifty casting – inexplicably making a bee-line for the home town where thoughtful liberal sheriff Marlon Brando's attempt to maintain order is compromised by him being planted in the job by the local oil magnate. The narrative's theatrical underpinnings stubbornly militate against its credibility, yet its vision of a cursed state where there's too much booze, too many alpha males, too many guns and too much racial bitterness still seems pretty forthright for its era and dismayingly relevant to this very day. On the whole, a messy affair, yet somehow captivating for its seething unresolved contradictions and Brando's mesmerising contribution.

Disc: A 4k restoration from the original negative looks sumptuous on Blu-ray, while the worthwhile extras include an engaging newly shot interview piece with James Fox explaining to Richard Ayoade how he got cast as a wealthy Texan when Peter

New releases

O'Toole dropped out, plus a lively trio (Redman, Kirgo and Dobbs) offering an astute, informed commentary on the film's fascinating strengths and flaws.

ITALIAN GENRE CLASSICS

DON'T TORTURE A DUCKLING

Lucio Fulci; Italy 1972; Arrow Video/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; Certificate 18; 105 minutes; 2.35:1. Features: original mono Italian and English soundtracks; audio commentary by *giallo* expert Troy Howarth; video discussion *Giallo a la campagna*, with *giallo* expert Mikel J. Koven; video essay by critic Kat Ellinger; interviews with co-writer/director Fulci, actor Florinda Bolkan, cinematographer Sergio D'Offizi, assistant editor Bruno Micheli, and assistant makeup artist Maurizio Trani.

KILL, BABY... KILL!

Mario Bava; Italy 1966; Arrow Video/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; 83 minutes; Certificate 15; 1.85:1. Features: original mono Italian and English soundtracks; new audio commentary by Bava expert Tim Lucas; video essay by critic Kat Ellinger; interview with assistant director Lamberto Bava; Semih Tareen's short film homage to Bava, *Yellow* (2006).

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

If you want to ascend the dizzy heights of ornamental lyricism achieved by the camerawork of Italian genre cinema during its 1960s and 70s, you cannot do much better than this duo (released as separate discs) by two of the more flamboyant artists to emerge during the period. Both men were crack technicians – Mario Bava was a cameraman's son – shooting without the burden of synch sound, as was then the Italian fashion, and what they lost in performance without live recording they more than made up for in opulent optic poetics.

Bava's *Kill, Baby... Kill!* and Lucio Fulci's *Don't Torture a Duckling* are two popular successes released six years apart – by the time *Duckling* came out, Bava's fortunes had begun to fade while Fulci was still in the process of establishing himself as a horror-fantasy filmmaker after a career spent mostly churning out comedies. *Duckling* is in the *giallo* genre that Bava had helped to codify in films like *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (1963) and *Blood and Black Lace* (1964), but it shares with gothic ghost story *Kill, Baby... Kill!* a rural setting and an atmosphere thick with superstition. (Among other things it provided Federico Fellini with the model for his milk-pale little devil girl in 'Toby Dammit', his segment of the 1968 portmanteau film *Spirits of the Dead*.)

Bava's film, set around the turn of the last century, was shot in the historic hillside town of Calcata, and its every long shot is a little masterclass in articulating space with colour, marked with splashes of gelled light on crumbling medieval walls. Fulci, filming in Matera in the rugged south, lays his scene at the intersection between Italy's ancient past and mod present. An elevated new super-highway brings the 20th century into the prehistoric landscape, but there are still hermit mystics in the hills, and though the latest pop sounds come through over the radio waves they are cranked up to cover the death cries of a suspected witch. And while the suspicious peasantry of *Kill, Baby... Kill!* are finally vindicated in their ancestral fears, in Fulci's village of 'Accendura' close-minded provincialism is depicted as a kind of fatal, epidemic rot, gossip and peeping the only permissible pastime outside of football and the church. Sexual liberation and hysterical, punitive panic in response to it, the twin poles that define the *giallo*, are both on hand in abundance, and the climactic pulping of the village priest's face makes for one of the most inspirational anti-clerical gestures in all of cinema.

Discs: A video essay by Kat Ellinger counters accusations of misogyny levelled at Fulci, while Brazilian actress Florinda Bolkan, in a recorded interview, happily describes her working relationship with the director: "I was Fulci's slave." Suffice to say, these matters are complicated.

BUSTER KEATON: 3 FILMS

SHERLOCK JR. / THE GENERAL / STEAMBOAT BILL, JR.

Buster Keaton; US 1924/1926/1928; Eureka Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate U; 191 minutes; 1.33:1. Features: *Buster Keaton: The Genius Destroyed by Hollywood*; Buster Keaton on *Wagon Train* – audio recording of Keaton in conversation with television writer Bill Cox; *Sherlock Jr.* – audio commentary by film historian David Kalat, *Movie Magic & Mysteries* featurette, location tour; *The General* – video interview on with Peter Kramer, location tour featurette, home movie footage, introductions by Orson Welles, Gloria Swanson; *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* – video essay on the making of the film; essay by Philip Kemp; archival writings; Keaton Family Scrapbook, Keaton family photographs.

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

The feature films made by Buster Keaton in the 1920s represent an extraordinary purple patch. At their best, his full-length films combine the relentless ingenuity of his short films with enjoyably sardonic storytelling. This Blu-ray box set collects three of his finest features in new 4K restorations. Alongside the movies, there is a rainy weekend's worth of additional material, some of which is new for this release.

The films begin with 1924's cinematic fantasy *Sherlock Jr.*, in which Keaton walked through the movie screen and thrilled the early surrealists with his ability to bend time, space and genre with stunts and edits. His masterpiece *The General* (1926) is here as well, naturally, in which Keaton spins sublime comedy out of a train hijacking during the American Civil War, and engineers what was then the most expensive stunt in film history, demolishing an entire bridge. Finally, there's the meteorological extravaganza *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, which dramatises Keaton's paternal anxieties amid a literal whirlwind of weather stunts. This last film, of course, includes the single most elegant and audacious gag in Keaton's career: the falling house, which leaves the Great Stoneface immaculately unruffled.

Kitchen sunk: *Life Is Sweet*

Discs: All three films, needless to say, are attractively polished in these new restorations, allowing a closer scrutiny of Keaton's often classically symmetrical compositions, not to mention the microscopic twitches of his own face. That is to say, the images are as sharp as Keaton's own choreography. The prints are fruits of a collaboration between the Cohen Film Collection and Cineteca di Bologna, and they debuted at the Il Cinema Ritrovato festival. All three films have excellent orchestral soundtracks: *The General* and *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* feature music composed by Carl Davis, while Timothy Brock has scored *Sherlock Jr.*

The bonus material kicks off with video interviews with Keaton authority Peter Kramer on each film, and a full-length commentary by David Kalat on *Sherlock Jr.* – all of which are bursting with information. There's a new documentary on Keaton, subtitled 'The Genius Destroyed by Hollywood', detailing his travails with the studio system, and an archive audio interview with him aged 63. Vintage clips of Orson Welles and Gloria Swanson introducing *The General* on TV offer critique spiked with pungent nostalgia. Featurettes include home movie footage and tours of the shooting locations for the earlier two films and a clip about the original General locomotive. The booklet contains a new essay by Philip Kemp, along with masses of archive material, including texts and vintage Keaton family photographs.

LIFE IS SWEET

Mike Leigh; UK 1990; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; Certificate 15; 103 minutes; 1.85:1. Features: short movie *A Running Jump*; commentary by Mike Leigh; interview with Jane Horrocks; Guardian Lecture (Leigh in conversation with Derek Malcolm, sound only); stills gallery; trailer; booklet.

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Mike Leigh's third cinematic feature is probably most fondly remembered for Timothy Spall's appallingly misconceived shot at a gourmet restaurant, the Regret Rien, serving such delicacies as black pudding and Camembert soup, pork cyst, and sheep's tongue in rhubarb hollandaise. But Leigh's chief focus is on the fractured North London working-class family who number Spall's would-be restaurateur Aubrey among their friends: gullible dad Andy (Jim Broadbent), his chirpily optimistic wife Wendy (Alison Steadman) and their mismatched twin daughters: practical, boyish apprentice plumber Natalie (Claire Skinner) and self-loathing bulimic Nicola (Jane Horrocks).

Food forms an erratic running theme: besides Nicola's bulimia and Aubrey's nightmare bistro, Andy's a professional chef who loathes his work (though he's very good at it) and lets his dodgy friend Patsy (Stephen Rea) flog him a hopelessly grungy mobile snack-bar that he plans to take to race-courses at weekends. Nicola only lets her sort-of boyfriend (David Thewlis) make love to her once he's licked Nutella off her breasts. What holds everything together is Leigh's affection for his characters, even

IN THE SHRIEK ZONE

A cluster of new releases brings into focus a neglected Italian master of genre movies: you're not ready for these *gialli*

FILMS BY SERGIO MARTINO

THE STRANGE VICE OF MRS WARDH

Italy 1971; Shameless/Region 0 Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 101 mins; 2.35:1. Features: introduction by Sergio Martino; interviews with Sergio Martino and Edwige Fenech; Fenech bio

ALL THE COLOURS OF THE DARK

Italy 1972; Shameless/Region 0 Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 94 mins; 2.35:1. Features: audio commentary by Kat Ellinger and Samm Deighan; interview with Sergio Martino

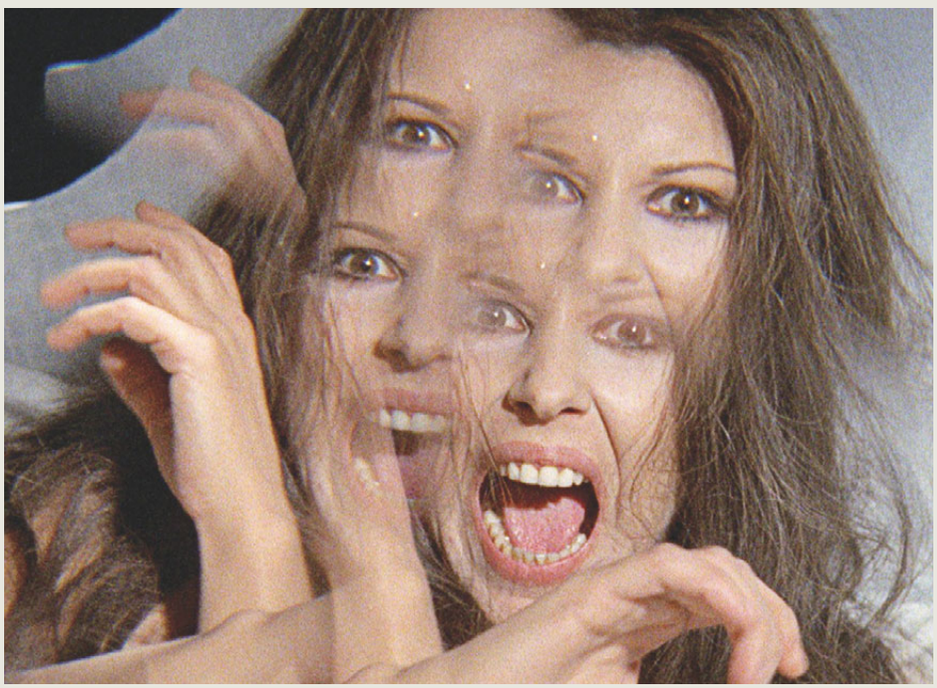
TORSO

Italy 1973; Shameless/Region 0 Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 93 mins; 2.35:1. Features: interview with Sergio Martino

THE SUSPICIOUS DEATH OF A MINOR

Italy 1975; Arrow Video/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; Certificate 15; 100 minutes. Features: original mono Italian and English soundtracks; audio commentary by Troy Howarth, author of *So Deadly, So Perverse: 50 Years of Italian Giallo Films*; new interview with co-writer/director Sergio Martino.

Reviewed by Virginie Sélavy



...you scream, we all scream: Edwige Fenech in *All the Colours of the Dark*

Italian director Sergio Martino worked in a wide variety of film genres, starting with Mondo-type documentaries in the late 1960s, followed by the obligatory western, before moving on to *giallo*, for which he is best known, and later, *poliziotteschi*. The 1960s and 70s were an ebullient time for the Italian film industry, which rapidly moved from one genre cycle to another, as filmmakers tried to cash in on the latest commercial successes. Although there had been earlier *gialli*, notably from Mario Bava, it was the popularity of Dario Argento's *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1969) that triggered the wave of psychosexual crime thrillers that dominated the first part of the 1970s.

Martino's first *giallo*, *The Strange Vice of Mrs Wardh* (1971), starred the voluptuous Edwige Fenech as the wife of a diplomat tormented by memories of her sado-masochistic relationship with her former lover, played by the alarmingly angular Ivan Rassimov. The plot, co-penned by Ernesto Gastaldi, a prolific writer behind many of the period's great films, combines elements of Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* (1955) and Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951) with the black-gloved serial killer typical of *giallo*. Brimming with style, sensuality and visual invention, the film sets its compelling study of a woman's conflicted desires among geometrically patterned flats and creepy crumbling mansions. Memorable scenes include the perversely poetic sequence where Rassimov showers Fenech with broken glass before making love to her, crushing crystal shards between their naked bodies; or the otherworldly murder scene in the misty, deserted Schönbrunn park. A European co-production, like many contemporary genre films, it was shot in Vienna and Sitges, and Martino effectively uses the contrast between the melancholy elegance of the Austrian capital and the sun-saturated Spanish seaside. The full sensory experience of *giallo* is completed by composer Nora Orlandi's yearning melodies and dynamic grooves.

After the Greece-set insurance-scam murder mystery *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail* (1971), *All the Colours of the Dark* (1972) moved to London, with Fenech playing a woman beset by nightmares, medicated by her boyfriend (George Hilton) and terrorised by Rassimov's intense stalker. Here, the *Diaboliques* influence (which runs through various Gastaldi scripts) is combined with a *Rosemary's Baby*-inspired Satanic cult plot to produce one of the most adventurous and hallucinatory *gialli*, its phantasmagorical atmosphere heightened by Bruno Nicolai's psychedelic soundtrack. Opening with a grotesque nightmare sequence and featuring a freaky occult ritual, *All the Colours of the Dark* feels like a kaleidoscopic mindscape, the internal portrayal of a woman frightened out of her wits by repressed secrets and the stifling legacy of the past.

Martino's next *giallo*, *Your Vice Is a Locked Room, and Only I Have the Key* (1972), drew its title from a sentence in *The Strange Vice of Mrs Wardh*, and reunited the same team for more marital dysfunction and twisted psychosexual games. *Torso* (1973), produced by Carlo Ponti rather than Sergio's brother Luciano Martino, was a departure from the first four *gialli* the brothers had made together. Set in the beautiful historical town of Perugia, it is a sleazier, simpler serial-killer thriller that prefigures the slasher movie. Where Martino's earlier work had revolved around troubled female psyches, *Torso* is the more straightforward tale of a murderer who punishes young, sexually free female students for the childhood tragedy that left him traumatised. The sexualised violence is more exploitative, without the rich ambiguities of Martino's previous *gialli*, but the direction is honed and brutally effective; the film features an eerie murder scene in a spectral birch forest.

'All the Colours of the Dark' feels like a kaleidoscopic mindscape, the internal portrayal of a woman scared out of her wits

After *Torso*, Martino turned to comedies and *poliziotteschi*, the latter a genre that was gaining popularity after Don Siegel's *Dirty Harry* (1971) and Stefano Vanzina's *Execution Squad* (1972). Emerging at a time when Italy was shaken by chaotic violence, these police thrillers reflected the widespread distrust in the authorities and the perception of the whole power structure as corrupt. Typically for the genre, Martino's *The Violent Professionals* (1973) and *Silent Action* (1975) focused on an uncompromising lone cop at odds with the crooked system that employs him. In *The Suspicious Death of a Minor* (1975), Martino and Gastaldi combined *giallo* and *poliziottescho*, and added incongruous touches of comedy. The charismatic Claudio Cassinelli is the unorthodox inspector who investigates a series of murders connected to a teenage prostitution ring and exposes the powerful figures behind it. A dynamic and spirited thriller despite the strange mix of tones, it culminates in a dramatic showdown in a tunnel through the Alps, but cannot conjure up the potent charge of Martino's best *gialli*.

New releases

at their most absurd or self-destructive. The comedy at times turns threateningly dark but, following a key breakthrough scene between Wendy and Nicola, the film wins through to a final note of hard-won optimism.

Jewel of the extras is Leigh's 35-minute short *A Running Jump* (2012) which picks up several elements of *Life Is Sweet* and replays them in lighter vein. Eddie Marsan's tirelessly motor-mouth used-car salesman is a joy to watch, even if you'd hate to meet him.

Disc: A fine clean HD transfer, with a generous bunch of extras to back up *A Running Jump*.

THREE FILMS BY KEN LOACH

RIFF-RAFF / RAINING STONES / LADYBIRD LADYBIRD

UK 1991/1993/1994; BFI/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD (separate editions); 96/91/102 minutes; 1.37:1/1.66:1/1.66:1; Certificate 18. Features: Ken Loach Guardian Lecture; *Face to Face: Ken Loach*; 2006 profile *Carry On Ken*; trailers; stills galleries; booklet.

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

It's fascinating to revisit Ken Loach's early 1990s output, partly because we now know that these films heralded the beginning of a remarkable career revival after a professionally near-disastrous period overlapping almost precisely with Margaret Thatcher's tenure at Number Ten, but also because their abiding social concerns remain relevant today: any of them could be double-billed with *I, Daniel Blake* and you'd scarcely notice the age gap. (Although a contemporary remake of *Riff-Raff* might have found space for a Pole or two among the Irishmen, Liverpudlians and West Indians working on its central building-site location.)

If *Riff-Raff* isn't exactly a comedy, its lively portrait of male camaraderie as a reasonably solid bulwark against the external forces of oppression none the less leavens what would otherwise be a study of rapidly crumbling dreams and the necessity of having to live outside a system that has made its priorities abundantly clear – the builders' jobs involve converting former working-class housing and hospitals into expensive flats, with safety regulations blithely flouted by their disinterested supervisors. Even a funeral scene has a mordantly funny punchline.

Raining Stones essentially relocates *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) from post-war Rome to post-Thatcher Middleton in Greater Manchester, and packs a similar punch, mercilessly depicting the downfall of a flawed but decent man (a pre-*Coronation Street* Bruce Jones) trying to support his family. The 'bicycle' here is a communion dress that will enable his daughter to play a full part in the local Catholic community – tellingly, Bob turns down the priest's offer of a second-hand dress in favour of funding an expensive new one via a loanshark, a fleeting moment of pride that leads to an all too foreseeable fall.

Liverpool comedian Crissy Rock made not just her professional but her acting debut *tout court* in the lead role of *Ladybird, Ladybird*, an astonishing performance as what was comfortably the most complicated and conflicted female character in Loach's output since Cathy in *Cathy Come Home* (1966). Maggie is wholly reliant on the state to subsidise and therefore regulate her chaotic lifestyle, and Loach and screenwriter Rona Munro are conscientious enough to underscore that Maggie's own poor life choices (many stemming from her uncontrollable temper) can be just as responsible for her various plights as her violent ex-boyfriend (Ray Winstone) and the harassed social workers who of necessity have to prioritise the welfare of her many children.

Beyond our Ken: Emer McCourt and Robert Carlyle in *Riff-Raff*

Discs: The high-definition masters look very nice indeed, the obtrusive grain of *Riff-Raff* being characteristic of its 16mm cinematography. Valuable extras include two lengthy interviews from the early 1990s (Loach's Guardian Lecture has already appeared on Signal One's *Hidden Agenda* and Eureka's *Kes*, but is more relevant to *Riff-Raff*) and Toby Reisz's 2006 documentary portrait.

MIRACLE MILE

Steve De Jarnatt; USA 1988; Arrow Video/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; Certificate 15; 87 minutes; 1.85:1. Features: video interview with De Jarnatt; audio commentary by De Jarnatt; audio commentary by De Jarnatt, cinematographer Theo van de Sande and production designer Chris Horner; *Julie and Harry*, interview with Mare Winningham and Anthony Edwards; supporting cast and crew reunion featurette; *The Music of Tangerine Dream* – interview with co-composer Paul Haslinger; deleted scenes; 'Rubiaux Rising', short story read by director.

Reviewed by Kate Stables

A cult outlier even in the niche category of apocalypse movies, Steve De Jarnatt's drama of nuclear-strike panic on the streets of LA has the pell-mell charm of a directorial passion project. An intensely 80s piece, wrapped in Lycra, boxy suits, and Tangerine Dream's thrumming synth-pop, its Reagan-era nuclear fears echo 1983's *The Day After* and *Testament*, but focus on the short anarchic interlude before the missile hits. Famous for tonal changes that are less genre switches than handbrake turns, its blithe rom-com opening swerves abruptly into a real-time thriller in which Anthony Edwards's hapless Harry must save his new love, after answering a wrong-number payphone call from a US missile silo announcing the coming annihilation. Nicely ambiguous about whether Harry is correct or just Chicken Little, the film's dips into sudden sentimentality or brutality (like the pair of cops immolated at a gas station) lend it an unpredictable appeal. As does the eccentric *Twilight Zone*-style discussion of whether he's being pranked, with a diner full of rapidly galvanised locals. In a film full of grandstanding character turns, Edwards's essential sweetness (a hangover from his 80s teen movies) gives Harry's doomed romance a dark poignancy.

Disc: The neon lights and popping palette of Johnie's retro coffee shop regain their lustre on this high-definition Blu-ray. In a hefty package of extras, the standout feature is De Jarnatt's gracious audio commentary, notably wry about what his determination to make the movie cost him.

LE PLAISIR

Max Ophuls; France 1951; Arrow Academy/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; Certificate PG; 97 minutes; 1.37:1. Features; 2002 documentary; interviews with assistant director Jean Valère, son Marcel Ophuls, and restorers of film; trailer.

Reviewed by Geoff Andrew

Not the best known of Ophuls's films, perhaps, but undoubtedly one of his finest achievements, this triptych comprises adaptations of three short stories by Guy de Maupassant, each in its very different way illustrating a sentiment that closes the film: "*le bonheur n'est pas gai*" (suggesting that the attainment of happiness isn't easy). All concern some kind of profound loss: of youthful energy in 'Le Masque', in which an old man devoted to dancing and women (except his wife) tries to conceal his age from fellow revellers; of innocence and idealism in 'La Maison Tellier', in which the women from a brothel take a trip to the country to attend a young girl's first communion; and of freedom and physical mobility in 'Le Modèle', which charts the faltering progress of a painter's relationship with his model.

The notion of mobility – indeed, of motion – is crucial to Ophuls's films, famous for their long fluid travelling and crane shots, and in this film the equating of movement with life itself is given its most explicit expression, especially in the first and third stories. But it is in the far longer central episode that Ophuls's artistry achieves a perfect combination of visual elegance, narrative sophistication and emotional profundity. The strangely meandering

narrative focuses first on the disappointment and hypocrisy of the brothel's regular clients, shocked to find it closed, before switching to accompany the madame and her girls to rural Normandy, where the former's brother (Jean Gabin) and his family provide hospitality. So far, so gently amusing; one enjoys the vivid picture of provincial life, the wry narration, the superb sets and the flawless acting of a marvellous cast. But then the film shifts quietly into a slightly different register as Rosa (Danielle Darrieux), in one of the cinema's most sublimely poignant moments, sheds a quiet tear, attaining a wondrous delicacy and depth of emotion which never lets up even in the subsequent lighter scenes. A stone might weep; such is happiness...
Disc: The documentary and interview features offer revealing insights into Ophuls's preoccupations and working methods.

VAMPIR CUADECUC

Pere Portabella; Spain 1971; Second Run/Region 0 Blu-ray; 65 mins; 1.37:1. Features: new interview with Portabella; filmed introduction with writer and curator William Fowler; Portabella's short films *La Tempesta* (2003) and *No Al No* (2006).

Reviewed by Ben Nicholson

The title of Pere Portabella's otherworldly *Vampir Cuadecuc* is, in itself, an act of political rebellion. 'Cuadecuc' literally translates as 'rat's tail' and was a term used to describe the unexposed end of a film reel. Rather than just a reference to the experimental style of the film – shot on out-of-date black-and-white 16mm and sound negative film – it is also a brazen use of the Catalan language, which was banned at the time, in the Spain of General Franco.

The film was shot on the set of Jess Franco's tediously faithful 1970 literary adaptation, *Count Dracula*. Tired of traditional Aristotelian structures, Portabella struck out to forge a new cinematic language, blending his own silent takes of Franco's dramatic scenes with candid behind-the-scenes footage. Although Portabella follows the same linear story as Franco, by eschewing dialogue in favour of Carles Santos's unsettling soundtrack he strips away the importance of plot.

Instead, equal prominence is given to the spraying of mock cobwebs on to the set; a brooding character breaking into a grin at the end of a take; or, in the film's most striking moment, Christopher Lee peeling off his Dracula makeup. The result is wonderful and unique, atmospheric and uncanny but also light-hearted. It is both a horror film and a deconstruction of one, brilliantly exposing the artifice of cinema,

Whack job: ***The Wages of Fear***

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (1)

Miracle Mile Steve De Jarnatt's drama of nuclear-strike panic on the streets of LA has the pell-mell charm of a directorial passion project

and memorably dismantling a fearsome mythic monument of a character – one who can easily be read as a stand-in for his country's dictator.
Disc: In addition to the high-definition re-master, Second Run's release includes interviews with Portabella and BFI curator William Fowler that contextualise the director's work and, specifically, *Vampir*. In addition, the disc includes two more recent shorts by Portabella both made in collaboration with Carles Santos.

THE WAGES OF FEAR

Henri-Georges Clouzot; France 1953; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; Certificate 12; 152 minutes; 1.37:1. Features: audio commentary by historian Adrian Martin; interviews with Clouzot's assistant director Michel Romanoff, biographer Marc Godin and academic Lucy Mazdon; audio of Yves Montand in conversation from 1989; trailer; booklet notes by Andy Miller, Karel Reisz, Penelope Houston.

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Acclaim from Christopher Nolan and a welcome revival of William Friedkin's 1977 remake *Sorcerer* will hopefully galvanise renewed interest in Clouzot's ageless action-thriller, here reissued in a new 4k transfer based on the original French release – and including five minutes of material never before seen in UK prints or video. Even if you have previous DVD incarnations on your shelves, this is a mandatory purchase, not least for the reinstatement of a key climactic moment between truck drivers Yves Montand and Charles Vanel which deepens the emotional resonance of the trials they've been through. Newcomers to the film will be struck by the cheese-wire tight tension Clouzot's direction brings to the suspense highlights as these desperate men guide nitro-laden trucks along the worst roads in South America (actually shot in the Camargue and around Nîmes in southern France), so hang on to your sofas. The modern action film essentially begins here, maximising location-shot realism and reducing reliance on back-projection, though those revisiting the film will also surely be struck by Clouzot's take on the precarious nuances of male friendship.

While 'bromance' was not a word in circulation in the early 50s, it certainly describes the flirtatiousness and bristling jealousies in the air as alliances form between these evidently straight men, all circling round the toxic prize of a major payday if they deliver the high-explosives needed to cap an oil-well blow-out in the field. As Adrian Martin's marvellous commentary elucidates, what emerges is a fusion of arthouse and genre modes, positing the ensemble bravado of Hawksian group enterprise before Clouzot's bone-deep pessimism ultimately holds sway. It's a masterclass in technique – which both Hitchcock and Kubrick look to have made a fruitful subject of study – but the glowering characterisation in the radically daring slow-burn opening hour proves equally arresting.
Disc: The sun is fiercer, the oil even blacker in this superb 4k restoration, impressively augmented by background interview material and Martin's impeccable commentary. The audio archive of Montand on stage at the NFT in 1989 doesn't add much to our knowledge of the Clouzot film, but he provides an engrossing career survey in his beguilingly accented, gravel-voiced English.

Lost and found

BLACK HAIR

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

Lee Man-hui's 1964 crime drama puts a South Korean spin on Western *noir*, and presents a femme who is the opposite of fatale

By Ben Nicholson

Despite making more than 50 films in a career spanning the early 60s to the mid-70s, Lee Man-hui remained largely overlooked, even in his native South Korea, for decades. It wasn't until a research project by film scholars in the late 90s, and a subsequent retrospective at the Busan International Film Festival in 2005, that his full body of work underwent much-needed reappraisal. He has since been lauded as one of the most influential directors in the country's cinematic history.

Best known as an anti-communist filmmaker, his most famous film is probably the war epic *Marines Who Never Returned* (1963), which was an enormous commercial and critical success. However, he wasn't interested in producing pure propaganda, and the film is remarkable for satisfying the censors while also being a stirring and nuanced anti-war piece, which humanises the enemy north of the border. Lee's entire oeuvre is a testament to his fine knack for balancing necessary adherence to the politics of the day with inspiring artistic experimentation; he toed the line but was also acutely able to push the envelope. While his role in introducing realism to Korean cinema is most often remarked upon, his films also feature deep veins of lyricism and fatalism that are just as striking.

Lee was often described as the 'poet of the night' and the label could hardly seem more apt than in relation to his early crime drama, *Black Hair* (1964). It's a uniquely Korean *noir* that takes genre motifs from the West and incorporates thematic and narrative elements that imbue them with a specifically Korean sensibility. You can observe the legacies of German expressionism and Japanese *sinp'a* drama coalesce to fascinating effect in this absorbing meditation on female oppression and the tumult of post-war modernity.

The term *sinp'a* was adopted to describe tear-jerking Korean melodramas of this period which told sentimental stories regularly revolving around tragic female suffering. Lee adopts the same central conceit for *Black Hair*, using the tropes of *noir* to transform the familiar melodramatic heroine into an unusual twist on the femme fatale. She comes in the charismatic form of Moon Jeong-suk (who would appear in over half of Lee's films), playing an abused gangster's moll, Yeon-sil. After her husband, the crime boss Dong-il (Jang Dong-he), discovers that she has been unfaithful he is forced to abide by his own previously determined rules and have her brutally punished: her face is slashed with a broken bottle; cast out, she is forced into prostitution and later faces a murder

Lady in the dark: Moon Jeong-suk as the abused Yeon-sil in *Black Hair*

Yeon-sil is the emotional centre of the film, upon whom the violence of men is visited and yet who still offers them redemption

attempt. As in many a *noir*, Yeon-sil is the fulcrum around which male characters pivot, but she differs from other popular iterations of the archetype in important ways. She is not an inscrutable seductress whose steel and intervention aids in driving a man's narrative. By utilising the fundamental traditions of *sinp'a*, Lee subverts the generic norms of *noir* and shifts the gender perspective. Yeon-sil is the protagonist, the emotional centre of the film, upon whom the violence of men is visited and yet who still tries to offer them redemption.

Her precariousness is emphasised by the presentation of a shadowy and threatening Seoul. We observe the experiences of a woman attempting to navigate the hostility of a Korea undergoing a rapid metamorphosis in the 1960s. *Films noirs* often engage with the broken-down areas neglected on the fringes, or between the cracks, of a modernising urban landscape. From the opening scenes of *Black Hair*, Lee and his cinematographer Seo Jeong-min frame abandoned buildings and dark alleys to create the sense of a labyrinthine underworld in a fragmented city. The sense of being trapped by environment and destiny is particularly evocative in the case of Yeon-sil.

On a more allegorical level, Yeon-sil is a direct stand-in for the country, allowing Lee to delve into psyches both individual and collective. The sharp lines of Seo's compositions in the chiaroscuro rubble can't help but echo the slashes on Yeon-sil's face, which she attempts to hide behind a sweep of coiffured hair. Both Yeon-sil's body and the Seoul of the film are casualties – and the physical sites of – violence in different forms. Amid the growing pains of a changing South Korea, the gangster Dong-il is damned by the cruel rules of his own making and stuck in a longing for reconciliation. He must not only break his own violent cycle to achieve redemption but must allow Yeon-sil's recovery. Her future is bound to the notion of a restored physiognomy: a key message for a country still attempting to heal the social scars of its recent history, delivered with style by a skilled craftsman.

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

'As in much of Lee's work, Yeon-sil and Dong-il are trapped by their own society and belief systems and finally perhaps by feeling. Yeong-sil is frequently captured behind bars or caught in a window, imprisoned within the frame... Lee breaks with the genre's trademark pessimism to offer the glimmer of a bittersweet ending and the chance of a new beginning for the much abused Yeon-sil now freed of her dark associations.'
Hayley Scanlon 'windowsonworlds.com'

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THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight&Sound

Keeping it in the family: Harry, Albert, Sam and Jack Warner

BAND OF BROTHERS

WARNER BROS

The Making of an American Movie Studio

By David Thomson, Yale University Press, 232pp, ISBN 9780300197600

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

And there they are, lined up on the cover photo in order of height and age, as if for an identity parade: Harry, Albert, Sam and Jack. The Warner brothers – or Bros, if you prefer. There were two other male siblings, Milton and Dave, and sisters too, but they don't figure – and in fact three of the featured quartet play only subsidiary roles. Sam died aged 40 – worn out, Jack always claimed, by his labours on Warner's game-changing, sound-pioneering *The Jazz Singer* (1927), which premiered on the day of his death and launched the studio into its glory years. Albert, the company treasurer, was reckoned, David Thomson reports, "the most ordinary and habitual of men, without much in the way of personality or ambition", whose "pleasure in life was to live simply and go to the track". The chief function of Harry, president of WB, a pious Jew and faithful family man, seems to have been to disapprove of his flamboyantly wayward, womanising youngest brother.

So Thomson's book, a recent entry in Yale UP's 'Jewish Lives' project, essentially revolves around Jack Warner, head of production at Warner Bros studio and, we're told, "maybe the biggest scumbag ever to get into a Jewish Lives series". Though by way of mitigation Thomson adds that "'scumbag' is a familiar term in the movie business, where it carries more affection than it would if it were being bandied about in insurance or undertaking". Rather in the same way, he suggests, that "we relish [Hollywood's] villains or tough guys on screen when they are people we would be scared to meet". And of all the Hollywood studios, of course, none could outdo Warners when it came to creating relishable, charismatic tough guys – as portrayed by Edward G. Robinson, James Cagney or Humphrey Bogart.

Indeed these Warner stars, and several others – Bette Davis, Al Jolson, Errol Flynn, Joan Blondell, Olivia De Havilland, Rin Tin Tin and Bugs Bunny – occupy nearly as much space in the book as does Jack. Few of them (with the possible exceptions of Rinty and Bugs) felt much affection for the studio boss; Cagney and Jack were mutually "fixed in loathing" and Bogart, Thomson notes, "had as healthy and sarcastic a dislike of Jack Warner as anyone on the lot". Davis's acrimonious running battle with him wound up in the English courts. But untrustworthy, vain and manipulative though he was, Jack – with the help, in WB's early years, of the young Darryl Zanuck – crafted a rambunctious studio with an ethos and an output all its own, one that "did gangster pictures and a new kind of showbiz musical like kids doing handstands," whose films "seemed to move, talk and shoot quicker than others".

Jack crafted a studio with an ethos and an output all its own, whose films 'seemed to move, talk and shoot quicker than others'

REX FEATURES (1)

Writing with all his accustomed wit, expertise and fluent brio, Thomson teases out themes in WB's output that reflect, he suggests, the fraught tensions between the brothers – in particular "the obsession with sibling rivalry and pals who become enemies". Among others he cites the rival brothers of *They Drive by Night* (1940), *The Master of Ballantrae* (1953), *Track of the Cat* (1954) and *East of Eden* (1955), the feuding sisters (or cousins) of *Four Daughters* (1938), *Devotion* (1946 – all three Brontës) and "Bette Davis and Miriam Hopkins seething together" in *The Old Maid* (1939), "a natural extension of the actresses' real loathing for each other". No doubt further examples could be located in the movies produced by other studios, but there's at least a case to be made that "the storytellers at Warners... had this smell of intimate violence in their heads".

What can't be disputed is the gritty immediacy, the 'torn from the headlines' urgency of WB movies, especially in the early 30s, that marks them out so clearly from the glossier productions of MGM or Paramount. "If the country was in a crisis," Thomson imagines some Warners front-office boss reflecting, "then shouldn't movies be there for the emergency?" The bleak hopelessness of the deservedly celebrated ending of *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932) – as Paul Muni's wrongfully accused man on the run, asked by his girl how he survives, melts away from her into the shadows with a hissed "I steal" – could surely have come from no other Hollywood studio in that period. Nor, it's fair to bet, would any other studio have dared – even had the idea crossed its mind – to insert into a fluffy backstage musical like *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933), all leggy Busby Berkeley chorus girls and Dick Powell's winsome grins, the pathos of Blondell's streetwalker singing 'My Forgotten Man', that accusing lament for World War I front-line heroes now reduced to ragged hobos.

So does Warner Bros deserve its "reputation as the most socially conscious or leftist studio outside the Soviet Union"? Thomson raises the question but leaves it open, acknowledging "an honorable story that goes above and beyond the record of other studios", but noting that "Warners could also be mean-spirited, hypocritical, and eager to make a buck on patriotism". Jack, wangling himself an honorary commission and strutting about the studio garbed as a lieutenant-colonel, partially inspired the Coens' pompous studio head Jack Lipnick in *Barton Fink* (1991).

Yet without Jack, *shvantz* though he may have been (the epithet, bestowed upon him by Cagney, is Yiddish for 'prick'), would the studio have created *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) or *The Big Sleep* (1946) – not to mention *Little Caesar* (1930), *The Public Enemy* (1931), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), *The Letter* (1940), *The Sea Wolf* (1941), *Casablanca* (1942), *Mildred Pierce* (1945), *White Heat* (1949) – and so many more that we look back on with pleasure and affection? Hard to dissent from Thomson's concluding verdict: "Jack could be a jerk – he couldn't be much else – but... he had led and bamboozled the best studio there ever was."

RONALD GRANT ARCHIVE (L)

METAPHORS ON VISION

Stan Brakhage & P. Adams Sitney,
Anthology Film Archives/Light Industry,
212pp, ISBN 9780997910209

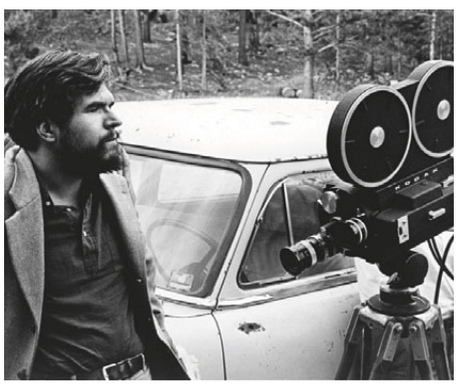
Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Fiction filmmakers who have outlined a theoretical system underpinning their practice are a somewhat rare breed – offhand one thinks of Sergei Eisenstein and the Robert Bresson of *Notes on the Cinematographer* (1975) – but among makers of experimental cinema the practice is almost *de rigueur*. As with so much, this can be traced to two milestone figures of the American avant garde: Maya Deren, with her 1946 text 'An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film', and Stan Brakhage, with his 1963 *Metaphors on Vision*.

Out of print for more than 40 years, *Metaphors on Vision* is now available anew thanks to a joint effort by two New York screening venues specialising in experimental work, Anthology Film Archives and the Brooklyn-based Light Industry. The edition they've brought out contains two full versions of the text – first a facsimile of the original corrugated-cardboard-bound publication, designed by Fluxus founder George Maciunas, with all typographical oddities intact; then a second, more legible version of the same text that includes marginalia noting the differences between various editions.

Both texts open, by way of introduction, with a wide-ranging interview between Brakhage and P. Adams Sitney, the author of *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde*, conducted shortly before the premiere of Brakhage's *Mothlight* (1963). Sitney, who helped to midwife the original publication at age 19, has also provided an extensive footnote section offering autobiographical context. This comes in the form of personal anecdotes and correspondences, and by identifying Brakhage's various allusions to such figures as John Cage and the abstract impressionist Clyfford Still, a wide array of poets, and the whole world-historical treasury of mythology all the way up to J.R.R. Tolkien – that Brakhage's erudition is massive is a fact that his eccentric grammar and spelling cannot disguise. (Sample: "The poetic experience is in itself an enlightenment until bulbed by guardeners and subjected to the shadow of clas-sickle-if-i-cation.")

Brakhage sought to move past the taught signification that hems in the child's untutored vision, to discover a new way of seeing



Stan Brakhage

At the time when he's writing here, Brakhage resembles Bresson in at least one important respect – his stated belief that cinema is an artform still waiting to be invented, that invention having been retarded by its imitation of other arts, and that he is the individual appointed to carry out that invention. For Brakhage, this requires a process even more radical than anything proposed by the French director; a shedding not only of the baggage of theatre and photography, but of moving through and past the taught signification that early on hems in the child's naive, untutored vision, to discover a new way of seeing beyond. Brakhage is not only outlining his concept of a new kind of cinema, but describing a new kind of viewer whose liberated vision has been prepared to receive that cinema. *Metaphors on Vision* combines aspects of the creative autobiography, written in collected essays, correspondences and film notes, with those of a manifesto, beginning as it does on a note every bit as stirring as anything by Messrs Marx and Engels: "Imagine an eye unruled by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perspective."

It should come as no surprise that the rhetorical approach of an artist dedicated to shedding the shackles of signification doesn't necessarily lend itself to a skim-through. "I deck my prose with whatever puns come my way," Brakhage writes by way of describing his dense, treacherous style, "aiming at deliberate ambiguity, hoping thereby to create a disbelief in the rigidity of the linguistic statement." This is an elusive text that doesn't surrender itself completely in an afternoon's perusal, though what does come across quite clearly throughout is Brakhage's deadly seriousness of artistic purpose and his complete dedication to pursuing "adventures of perspective" wherever they may take him. One striking instance comes in his discussion with Sitney of observing in agony the decay of the family dog, left in the woods outside to rot, a process memorialised in his *Sirius Remembered* (1959), and Brakhage's repeated citations of his life with his wife and collaborator Jane evoke a domestic existence of ceaseless questioning and self-examination that is anything but routine. Elsewhere, he can be found recalling a recurring imagination of childhood, "backed into caves of a mountain and attacked by an enemy... hopelessly out-numbered but always confident of eventual success." Such a heroic self-image may embarrass an age that blanches at the slightest suggestion of self-importance – but it shouldn't be forgotten that Brakhage did, finally, hold his ground.

MISS D & ME

Life with the Invincible Bette Davis

By Kathryn Sermak with Danelle Morton, Hachette Books, 278pp, ISBN 9780316507844

By Dan Callahan

When she was on her deathbed, Bette Davis asked her treasured friend and loyal assistant Kathryn Sermak to write a book about their life together from 1979 to 1989. It has taken Sermak nearly 30 years to make good on that promise and offer this true insider's look at Davis, who emerges as surprisingly self-aware and very concerned with manners and protocol. We get the real person here instead of the temperamental screen version, someone who was both vulnerable and sensible.

Davis saw the young Sermak as a project, taking her through what was essentially her own private finishing school, and Sermak was wise enough to accept this. Sermak presents an alternative view of Davis's relationship with her daughter B.D. Hyman, and makes us understand why the actor's reactions were sometimes so extreme. On a long family weekend, for example, when Davis cries because there isn't enough Coca-Cola left for one of her grandsons, Sermak makes us understand that she is a perfectionist, with standards so high they were often not met.

The weakness of this book is that it offers almost no details on Davis's process as an older actress, even though Sermak went through every script with her and apparently helped her to rewrite her lines. But there is a great scene towards the end of the book that makes it all worthwhile. Davis has suffered a mastectomy and a stroke, and has just completed a return to work in a TV movie called *Murder with Mirrors* (1985). Doctors have advised Sermak not to tell Davis that her daughter B.D. has written a negative memoir about growing up in her mother's shadow, *My Mother's Keeper*, until after the film has finished shooting because they fear the news might kill her.

Davis is devastated when Sermak tells her about her daughter's betrayal, and then a messenger informs them that Davis needs to reshoot a scene for her film. "Oh my God, no," Davis says. "I can't. No, I can't." But then Sermak describes Davis lighting a cigarette and trying to sit up straighter in her chair. She takes three long puffs, and the nicotine seems to restore her. "What scene do they want to reshoot, Kath?" she finally asks. "Is there some dialogue we need to go over?" Davis herself was fully aware of the dramatic possibilities of this moment in her life, which she makes clear to Sermak later on when they take a road trip together.

Bette Davis and Paul Henreid in *Now, Voyager*

This awareness even extends to her death. "I'm so sorry to do this to you," Davis tells her doctor. "I apologise for the terrible calamity that will ensue when the press finds out that I died here in your hospital." A comment like this expresses both Davis's New England propriety and her keen sense of theatre and occasion, and this book offers new insight into what made this woman one of the key figures of the 20th century.

SILENT CINEMA

Before the Pictures Got Small

By Lawrence Napper, Wallflower Press, 144pp, ISBN 9780231181181

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

There are a handful of silent films that most cinephiles see first: *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), *Metropolis* (1927), *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (1927), *The General* (1926) and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) perhaps, along with *Nosferatu* (1922), a Hitchcock and a couple more Hollywood favourites. There is nothing dismaying about the establishment of these films as classics of the silent era, widely available on DVD and at festivals. But this very select canon can offer a distorted picture of the period. At the very least, there is a risk that these examples are heralded as rare triumphs from a primitive age.

This is where Lawrence Napper's engaging guide to late silent film comes in. *Silent Cinema: Before the Pictures Got Small* offers a broader picture of film style and the film industry between World War I and the coming of sound. The opening chapter begins with the audience, tracing the history of filmgoing in this period, using the depiction of cinemas in silent movies. Subsequent sections provide context for those film-club favourites, outlining the industry and aesthetics of the cinema in Germany, Russia and America.

In these chapters, Napper revisits and challenges some fondly held views. Particularly, he stresses that there is far more to the national silent cinemas of Germany and Russia than expressionism or Soviet montage, respectively. He follows a detailed discussion of *Caligari* with the suggestion that the reader looks at Ernst Lubitsch comedies such as *The Oyster Princess* (1919) and *The Doll* (1919) to discover similar stylisation in both performance and design, but applied in the name of pleasure and humour rather than the evocation of psychological trauma. Likewise, the Russian section moves on from the montagists to comedies and dramas: from the 'Americanitis' caper *A Kiss from Mary Pickford* (1927) to the social problem film *Bed and Sofa* (1927). It also makes space for a close look at the pre-revolutionary artistry of Yevgeni Bauer. The Hollywood chapter considers the role of immigrants and the "desiring feminine gaze" (exemplified by Clara Bow in *It* in 1927) alongside expected subjects such as the development of continuity editing and the Hollywood studio system.

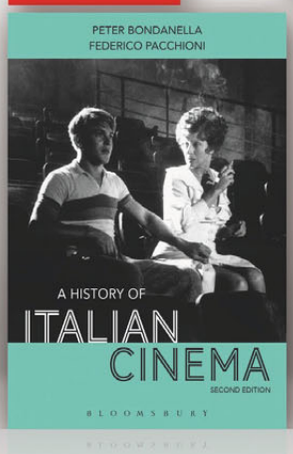
The book makes the case for British cinema in the 1920s – from Cecil Hepworth to sophisticated works such as 'Hindle Wakes'

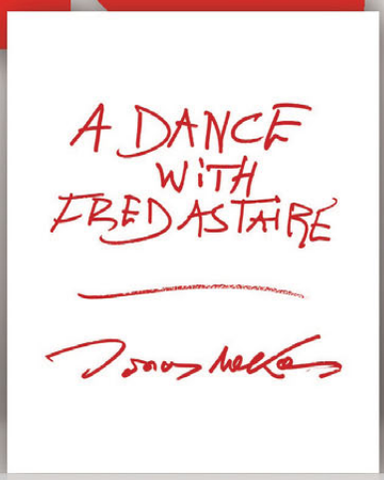
The final, passionately argued chapter makes the case for British cinema in the 1920s – from Cecil Hepworth's sumptuous pictorialist dramas earlier in the decade to sophisticated later works such as Maurice Elvey's *Hindle Wakes* (1927) and Anthony Asquith's *Shooting Stars* (1928). There are references too, to Alfred Hitchcock, director of the best known British silents, who later "liked to convey the impression that he had been a lone genius in Britain, working alongside a collection of amateurs".

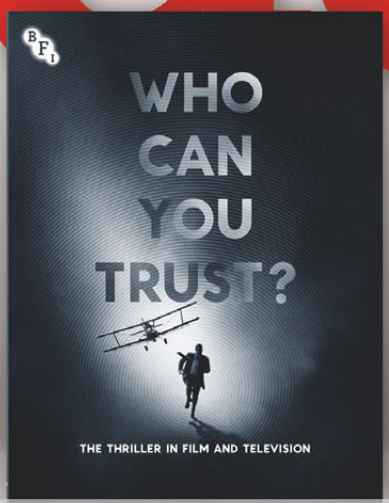
This is a short book, but one that is filled with ideas, fresh approaches to classic films and a palpable enthusiasm for the subject. It will prove invaluable to students and refreshing to those better versed in this period.

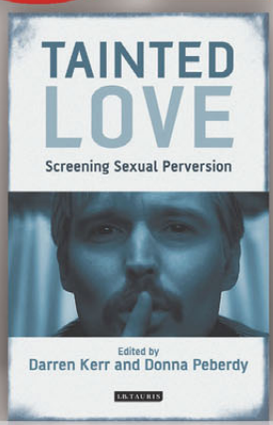
The end of the affair: Estelle Brody and Marie Ault in Maurice Elvey's *Hindle Wakes* (1927)

Read









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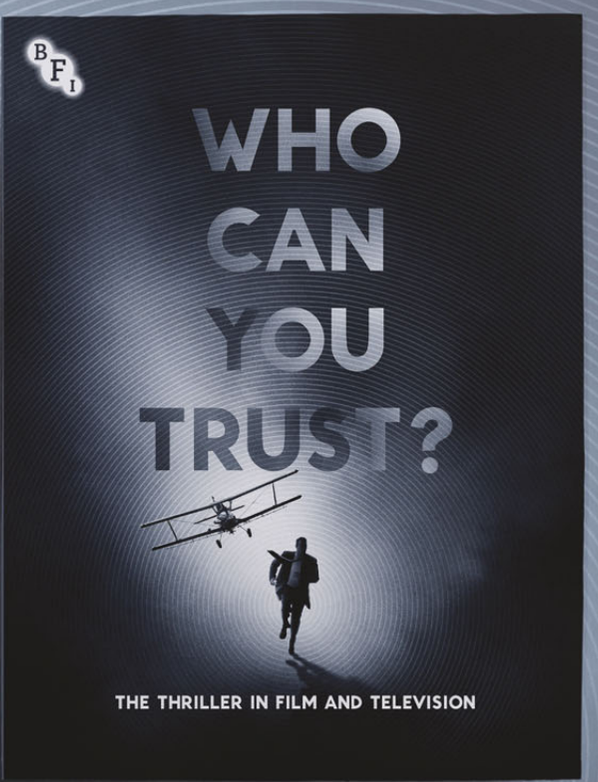

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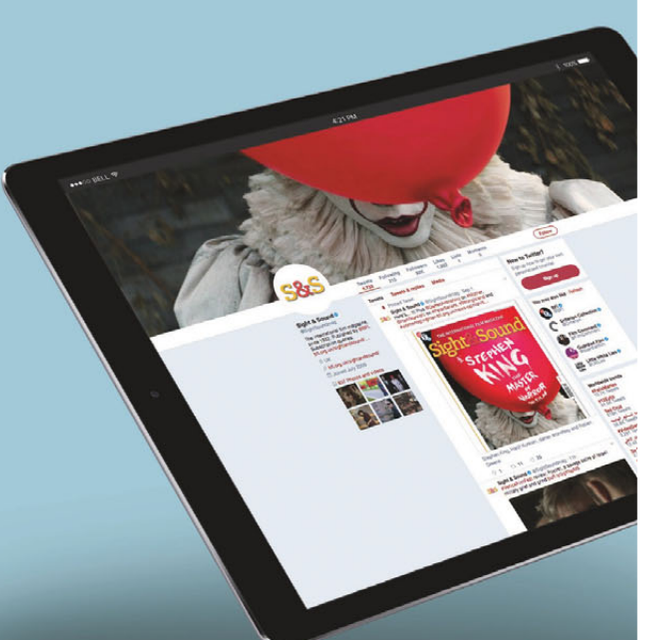

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SQUEEZE BOX

There are probably other people besides Philip Herbert (Letters, *S&S*, November) who have problems with the presentation of old Academy ratio films on modern widescreen television sets. Therefore, let it be known that all widescreen television sets have an option somewhere in the settings within their menu systems for adjusting the display from the standard 16:9 aspect ratio to the 4:3 aspect ratio that is correct for old films.

Of course, this puts a horizontal squeeze on to the advertisements when they appear, but this is about art, not commerce, isn't it?
Barry Salt *By email*

LESSONS OF THE MASTER

Some of Hitchcock's co-conspirators for various reasons failed to acknowledge their lowbrow sources and as a consequence these are not always picked up in subsequent accounts, such as the film *78/52* (Reviews, *S&S*, November). Robert Bloch, for instance, liked to claim that the Ed Gein murders were the sole source for his 1959 novel *Psycho*; however, Henri Barbusse's banned bestseller *L'Enfer* (1908), about a demented young man who spies through a peephole on fellow tenants in a rooming-house, would be much closer to the mark (that Clouzot named his unfinished *Psycho* knock-off *L'Enfer* was perhaps no coincidence). Likewise, Julien Duvivier's film *Panique* (1946 – see Ginette Vincendeau's book review, *S&S*, November), about a con-man who uses a woman to lure an unsuspecting dupe into taking the rap for a murder he committed, is a far more likely source than the classical mythology pretentiously claimed by *Vertigo*'s original authors when they sold it to Hitchcock; it even has a roof-top fall from a gutter.

Hitchcock himself was not troubled by drawing from popular culture; but in not acknowledging these sources, film historians may be betraying their own reluctance to engage with the more popular culture of the day, as well as missing out on crucial references that would not have been lost on contemporary audiences. The absence of this context attracts wholly fabricated pathologising portrayals of Hitchcock – as in the 2012 biopic starring Anthony Hopkins, in which the director is seen peering through peepholes at his female stars.
Stephane Duckett *London*

NOSTALGIA AIN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE...

Recent letters pages (Letters, *S&S*, August) have extolled a golden era when British television afforded us the opportunity to see excellent examples of world cinema. I, too, fondly remember coming across Eisenstein for the first time via the BBC in the 1960s, and those of us who were able to view the experimental films shown by Harlech TV in the early 1970s were given a fascinating alternative to our local suburban cinemas. Alejandro Jodorowsky's *Tar Babies* (*Fando y Lis*, 1967) haunted my imagination till recently, when I finally came across an imported DVD.

There is, however, an alternative, far less rosy version. This was a period when we waited at least five years before films could be shown on TV; they were often butchered to fit set timeslots and on ITV were constantly interrupted for adverts or the news; cuts were made on top of those demanded by the British Board of Film Classification. Most annoying of all was the crude use of panning and scanning. Given all this and the limited quality of picture transmission and the television receivers available, perhaps it was not such a golden period.
Roy Pierce-Jones *Warwickshire*

KEEPING SCORE

While I was pleased to find an interview with Denis Villeneuve on *Blade Runner 2049* ('Crimes of the Future', *S&S*, November), I was disappointed that there was no mention of the unfortunate fate of Jóhann Jóhannsson's score for the film – especially when Villeneuve stressed the creative freedom he had supposedly been given by Ridley Scott.

What about the music – where was the creative freedom there? It seems likely that Jóhannsson, a long-time collaborator with Villeneuve (*Prisoners*, *Sicario*, *Arrival*), was squeezed out by Hans Zimmer and Benjamin Wallfisch because of Scott's influence – Scott having worked with Zimmer on *Gladiator* (2000) and other films, and having no prior link with Jóhannsson.
Vasco Hexel *Area leader in composition for screen, Royal College of Music*

...THEN AGAIN

May I add some further reminiscences about world cinema on TV? When Channel 4 began in 1982, it screened a series of classics on Sunday afternoons, including Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972), which introduced me to the great director's films. There was also a series on a weekday evening in which well-known directors introduced their favourite films – among them *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966), *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) and *Cries and Whispers* (1972).

I have also read that one of the first films screened on ITV when it opened in 1955 was Vittorio De Sica's *Miracle in Milan* (1951). While it is much easier nowadays to access such films, the chance of coming across them on TV is, sadly, virtually non-existent.
Alan Pavelin *London*

Additions and corrections

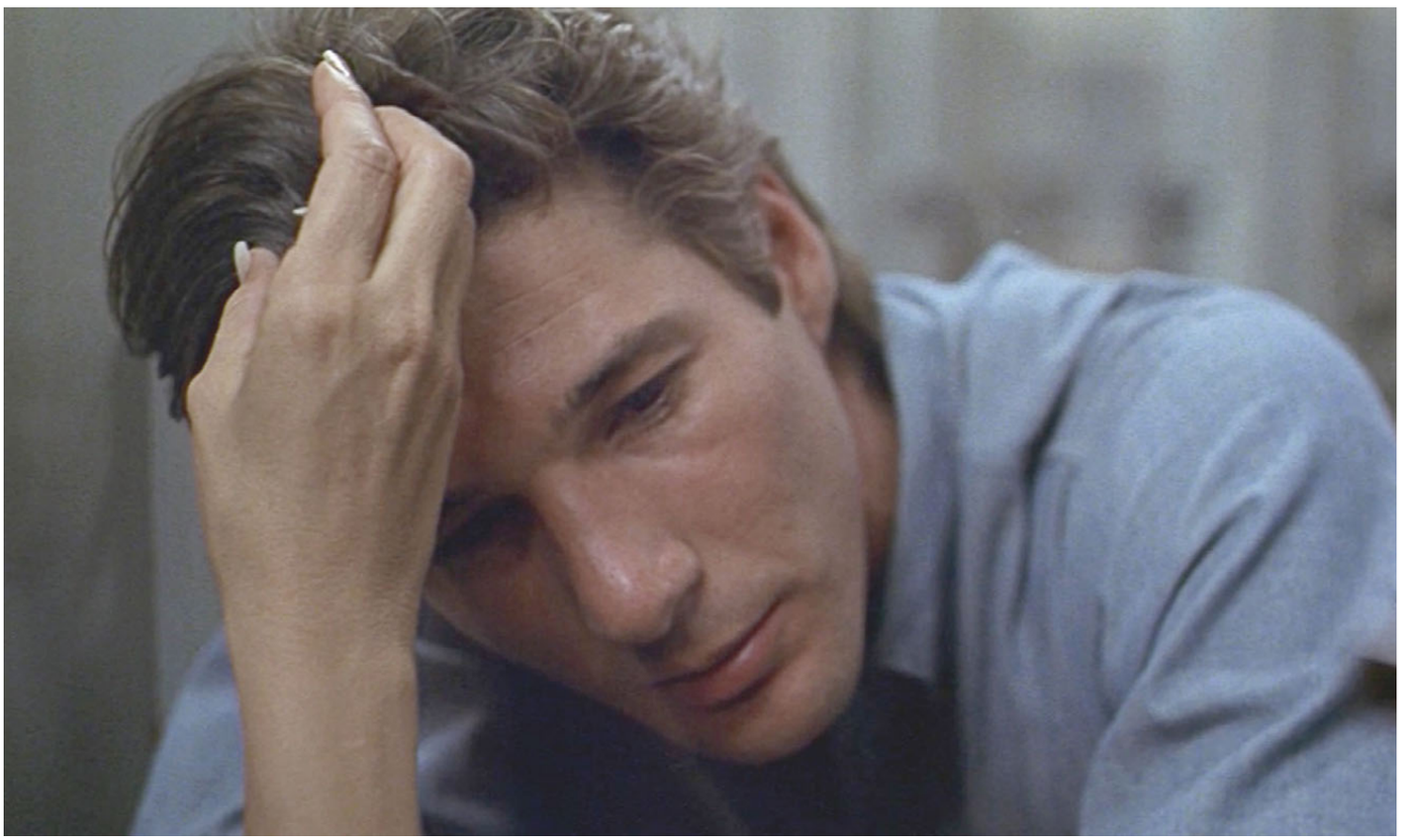
October p.72 *On the Road*: Certificate 15, 120m 43s
November p.54 *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*: Certificate 15, 120m 37s; p.70 *I Am Not a Witch*: Certificate 12A, 92m 50s; p.71 *Ingrid Goes West*: Certificate 15, 97m 40s; p.75 *The Meyerowitz Stories (New and Selected)*: Certificate 15, 112m 9s; p.77 *The Mountain Between Us*: Certificate 12A, 111m 44s; p.81 *Thelma*: Certificate 15, 116m 23s; p.81 *Unrest*: Certificate 12A, 97m 40s

LETTER OF THE MONTH
ENIGMA CODE

Most of the commentary on Hans Zimmer's use of Elgar's *Enigma Variations* theme in his magnificent score for *Dunkirk* (*S&S*, September) seems to have missed what is surely the whole point. The melody is thoroughly tortured by Zimmer, stretched almost beyond recognition in a very clear allusion to the state of British hegemony in 1940. It is far from a jingoistic quotation (of music that is not itself jingoistic anyway, though Elgar is so misunderstood today that the average cinemagoer could be excused for not realising that).
Barnaby Page Suffolk

ENDINGS...

AMERICAN GIGOLO



Paul Schrader's film seems obsessed with surface gloss and the trappings of luxury, but in its last moments it reveals an inner beauty

By Christina Newland

A woman looks out of place in a prison visiting room, wearing a chocolate-brown knit twinset and an elegant blonde bob. She places her manicured hand to the glass partition. A pillowy-lipped, almond-eyed young man leans toward her, seeming every bit as out of place in his prison uniform. He tenderly tilts his forehead against the window.

"Oh god, Michelle. It's taken me so long to come to you."

In a film as unsentimental as *American Gigolo* (1980), it is as though there has been a sudden unblocking of an emotional dam. It's a singularly moving moment of love and reassurance, an anti-*noir* ending for a film so pristinely modelled on the tropes of *film noir*. Lauren Hutton and Richard Gere gaze at one another; each of them is every ounce the movie star, and their characters glow with the sort of beauty that has inevitably shaped their lives as escorts and arm candy to the rich and powerful.

Julian is a high-class male escort, mostly for wealthy older ladies; Michelle is the unhappy wife of a politician. These roles have afforded them both luxury lifestyles; they occupy a moneyed sphere of Los Angeles, she in the bright artifice of the public eye and he in the nocturnal underbelly of the city. But they are lonely souls, drifting between high-end hotel bars and art auctions, seemingly unaware of how disconnected and unhappy they are. Julian has been framed for a murder he didn't commit, and it is Michelle's alibi that will presumably save him. She not only believes in his innocence, but is willing to face a public scandal by admitting her affair with him. Julian can finally reckon with his own selfishness through his lover's selfless act.

If ever a film pre-empted the 80s' preoccupation with material wealth, *American Gigolo* is it. Paul Schrader's film could easily be read – and has been, by some – as flinty and superficial, merely displaying in a seedier light the luxury trappings of the America that was about to elect Ronald Reagan president. It is true that the sun-soaked California setting is one of penthouse suites and Armani suits, sensual bronze tans and one very sleek Mercedes SL. Spiritual sickness never looked so good, and the film's visual pleasures are only paralleled by aural ones through its soundtrack – Giorgio Moroder's synthesiser disco, Debbie Harry singing "Roll me in designer sheets". Yet there are sharper observations within.

Julian is, initially, as amoral and smug as Joe Gillis, William Holden's down-on-his-luck screenwriter turned older woman's plaything in *Sunset Blvd.* (1950); his love interest Michelle is as coolly blond and willowy as vintage Lana Turner. Yet for all of Schrader's more contemporary, sleazy trappings – bondage play that turns to sex murder, turning tricks but avoiding "fag stuff" – Julian can't be as bitterly cynical as his hard-boiled antecedents. In the closing scenes of the film, the gigolo finds an altogether better fate, in a deeper, truer sense – *American Gigolo* belongs to a niche tradition of filmmakers obsessed by spiritual ordeals and sins of the flesh. Though entranced by classic *film noir* and forged from fatalistic 70s American cinema, Schrader's viewpoint is always underpinned by his Calvinist background.

The debt to Bresson can be seen in Schrader's restraint, his cautious optimism, the 'buried passion' in the conclusion

Essentially, the film concludes with a restaging of the final scene of Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959). Bresson, a Catholic, was a longtime figure of admiration and study for Schrader, whose only book of film criticism was partly about Bresson's 'transcendental style'. *Pickpocket*, like much of the filmmaker's work, was visually spare, featuring characters who tend to subsist on few worldly goods. This may seem antithetical to the lavish excess on display in *American Gigolo*, but the debt to Bresson can be seen in Schrader's own restraint, his cautious optimism, what the critic Roger Ebert called the "buried passion" in the conclusion.

It might seem pretty unremarkable to say that *American Gigolo* closes on a romantic note, and that it uses love as a means of redemption for its central character. But this is not redemption from an actual moral failing so much as it is a rescue from the kind of spiritual emptiness that precedes it. In a town built on reputation and appearances, Julian begins to have everything stripped away – quite literally, in the case of that Mercedes. And what a long time it has taken for him to be humbled, to survive in the proverbial wilderness. What a beautiful moment of grace in a film that, in spite of its stylish flourishes, is about a very ugly world.

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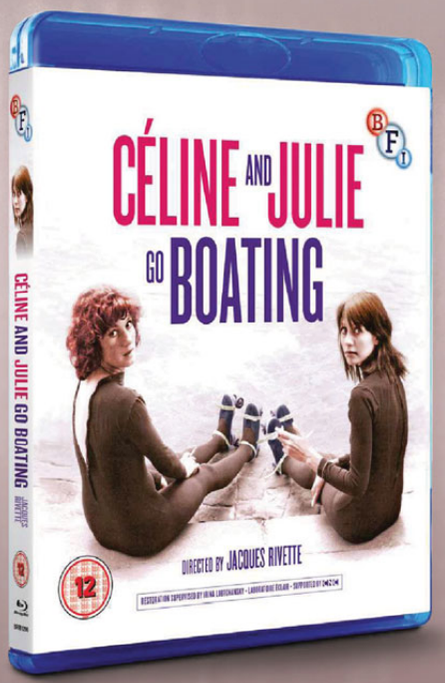

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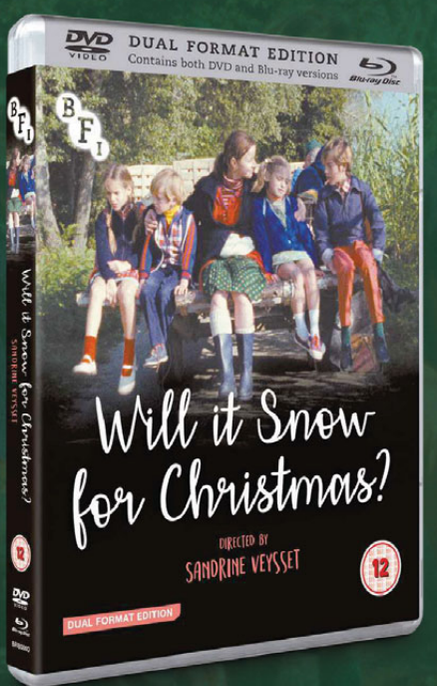

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